A BLACK JOHN SMITH story by James B. Hendryx

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Short Stories

March 25th Twice A Month 25c

The Police knew they wanted the pay-roll robber—but they didn't know how badly they needed him!

Complete Novel

G-HEAT

by

Robert H. Rohde

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Listerine's success in reducing the number of colds is due to germ-killing action in mouth and throat

Colds are infections. Why not treat them as such—not with harsh drugs powerless against bacteria, but with a first-rate antiseptic that kills germs quickly?

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People who follow this system may expect fewer colds and fewer sore throats. That has been proved over and over again by scientific tests in which Listerine was used.

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Remember, your cold is accompanied by germs, which invade the body through the mouth and throat. Promptly killed or even held in check, they may do no damage. Allowed to multiply, these bacteria are almost certain to get the upper hand. A mean cold or a nasty sore throat often follows.

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Even 3 hours after its use, vulnerable areas show a substantially reduced bacterial count.

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Listerine

- at the first sign of Cold or Sore Throat

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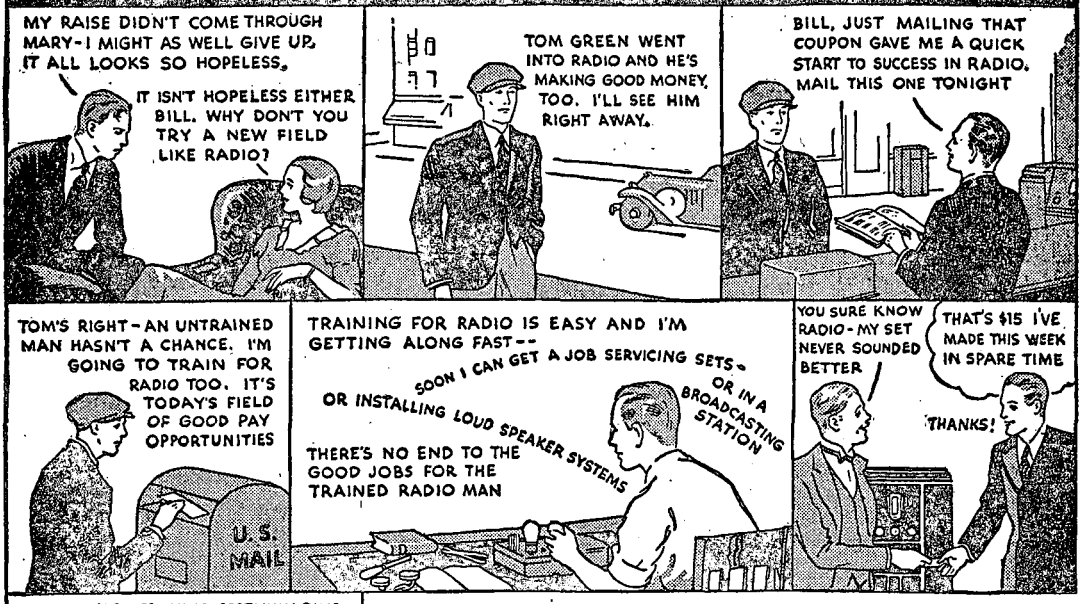
HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!


MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH MARY—I MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP. IT ALL LOOKS SO HOPELESS.
IT ISN'T HOPELESS EITHER BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY A NEW FIELD LIKE RADIO?
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THANKS!
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OH BILL, IT'S WONDERFUL YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO.

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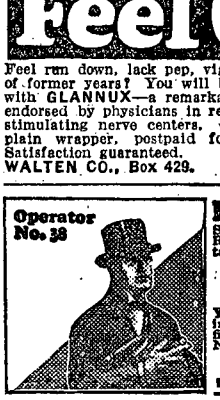

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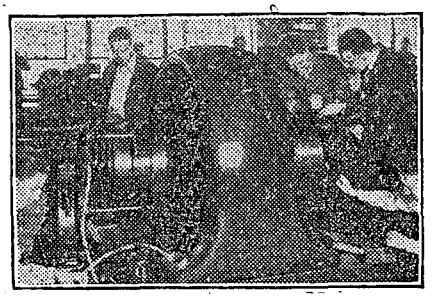

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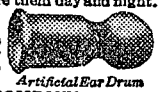

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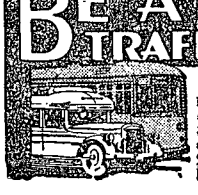

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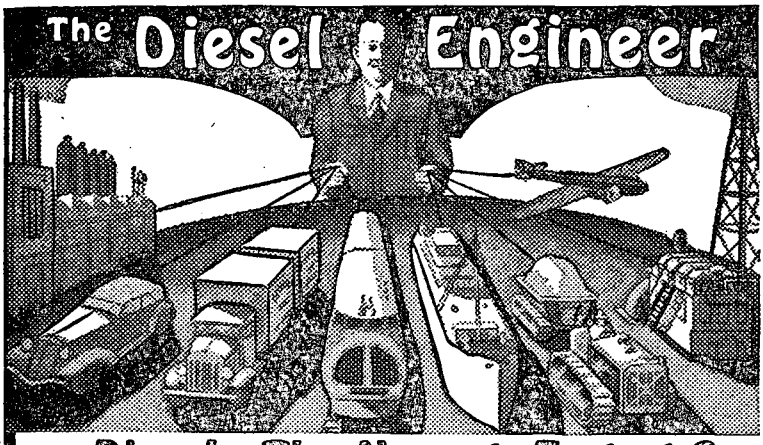

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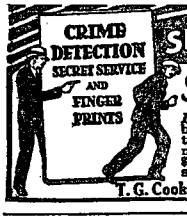

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28x5.50-18	2.95	1.15
29x5.50-19	2.95	1.15
6.00-17	3.10	1.15
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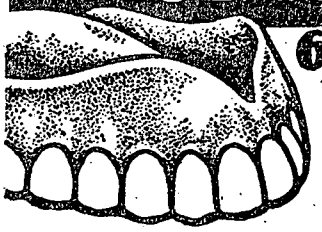

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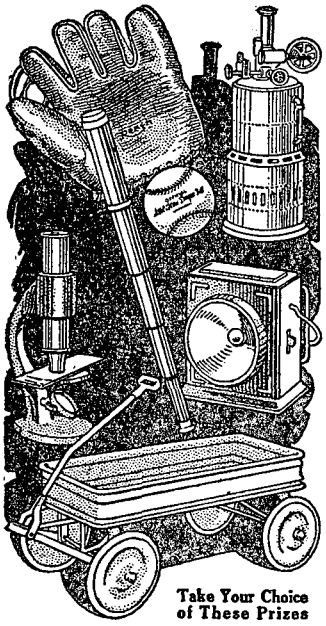

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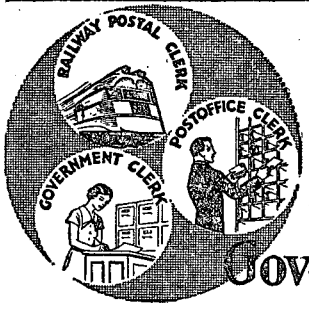

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ADVENTURE, THRILLS, MYSTERY

Stories

HARRY E. MAULE, *EDITOR*

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MAR. 25th, 1936

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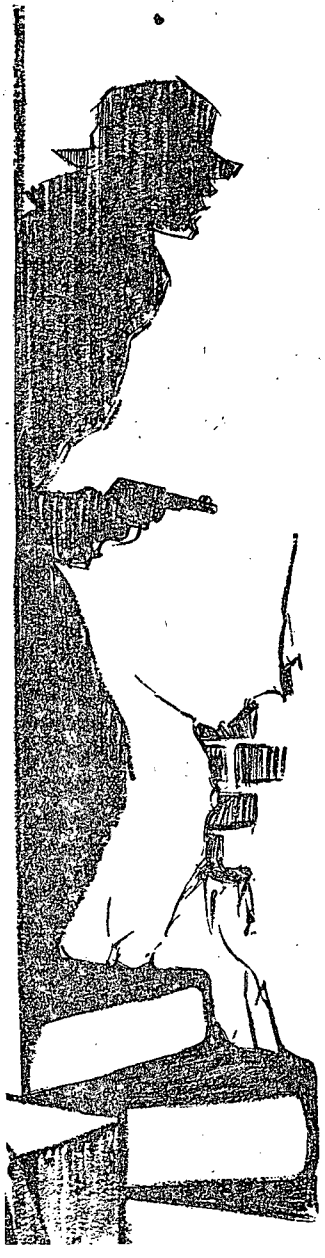

The Police of Drummond Knew They Wanted the Man Who Had Vanished With the Payroll Money—but They Didn't Really Know How Badly They Needed Him

G-HEAT

By ROBERT H. ROHDE

Author of "Case Ten," "Murder in Effigy," etc.

CHAPTER I

HOSPITAL HIDEAWAY

GASPING there under the ether cone, his wounded shoulder bared for the probe, Pryor was stricken by a sudden disastrous thought: "They're not giving me enough of this stuff—not anywhere near enough!"

The pain wasn't quite so sharp, perhaps, as it had been; but his head, which was all wrong, was as clear as a bell. He knew everything that was going on, with chilling distinctness heard every word spoken.

Hoband's blonde nurse, routed out of bed to pinch-hit with the anaesthetic, was sleepy and sore. She yawned, "I won't get a wink after this is over, not one damn wink. Tomorrow I'll be dead on my feet."

Instruments clinked in their germicidal bath and Hoband came back at her, "You picked it." His heels clicked on the floor tiles; when he spoke again he was close by, had a hand at Pryor's pulse. "Okay, Gwen. That'll do. He's away."

Desperately Pryor tried to tell them that he was still very much present, and to his horror he could not. His protest froze in his throat. He struggled to rise, to fight them off, and the operating table tilted steeply with his straining. It went down at the head, up at the foot; cracked against the tiles, rebounded, see-sawed. In another moment it had gone inexplicably, crazily, into a terrific, soaring spin.

Somewhere in distance a clock struck. Four of those remote soft bongs, and when the fourth was a shimmering echo Pryor recognized with a gust of relief that brakes had taken hold. The whirling slowed, ceased.

His eyes opened and blinked. He was, weirdly, no longer in the little white operating-room. This was a bedroom and it was the blonde nurse, not Hoband, who was beside him. Her slim, cool hand lightly gripped his wrist.

She had outgrown her peeve; his stare won a smile. She told him, "The bullet's out. You're on the way to being as good as new."

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If Dr. Hoband's good-looking private nurse was dead on her feet it was certainly her own secret. Trim in her crisp uniform, her hair cleared of that earlier unlovely bristle of nickeled wave-while-you-sleep gadgets and set in smooth, shining waves, she was a symphonic eyeful in white and gold—freshness personified.

"It's four," she said, "in the afternoon. When you take ether, big boy, it stays took. You've been under for twelve straight hours."

She went to raise the drawn shades, and Pryor's estimate as his eyes followed her was, "Pretty as hell, and probably hard as nails." Then he thought, "Hard? How could she be anything else in a joint like this?"

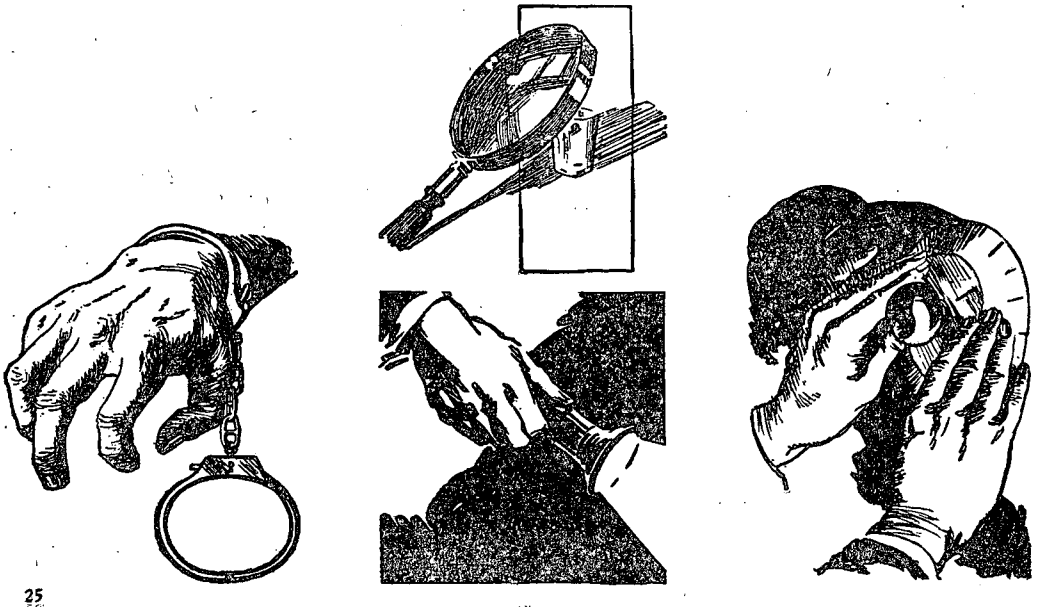
He saw her moving to the door, slipping out, and as her step faded memories surged. Again he was hearing the thr-r-r-rup of the blazing tommy-guns; feeling the smart of the tear-gas, the smack of the slug that had caught him just at the wash-up; seeing Burke and Scully and Moreno flop around the floor in the stone house like hooked flounders on a pier.

They had been shot to hell, all three; no chance for any of them. He had known when he dashed for that little cream-colored coupe parked down the dark road, handily headed toward Drummond, that Burke and Moreno were already morgue numbers. And Scully, lead-stitched clean across the chest, had been as good as gone then, too. He must have checked out, Pryor figured, just about the time the coupe started rolling with the girl from the *Evening Herald* white-faced at the wheel.

His one regret, that girl was. For Burke and Scully and Moreno, he had no tears to shed. People who lived as they lived, and as he lived, rode for a machine-gun finish; when it came, that was that. But it was rotten that he'd had to put a scare on such a grand little dame as the coupe's owner had most surely been.

He wondered how she'd made out after he'd ditched her; hoped she hadn't had to walk far or wait long for a lift. Three in the morning had been a sweet time to turn her loose on that black empty road, between towns. But it had been one of those things. It had to be done. The hell with fretting about it.

Here he was, snug in Hoband's, not hurt much, set. Why let anything worry him? Beyond the window, two or three miles to the west, the tall buildings of downtown Drummond were exclamation points against the autumn sunset. Lawless, juic-



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ily opulent a city was Drummond, paradise of crooks—his oyster!

GOLDEN GWEN, of course, had whisked off to call Hoband. He breezed in presently, spruce in tweeds, to look at the shot-up shoulder and to glean information discreetly within the province of his own personal interests.

Tacitly, gunshot wounds and strangers preferring to keep their business to themselves were in the routine here. Not only subsurface Drummond but a thousand other loosely-interlocked underworlds knew this little out-of-the-way private hospital of Hoband's as a safe port in a storm. Patients more or less mysteriously afflicted by lead-poisoning, close-mouthed men both able and eager to pay handsomely for expert surgery that asked no embarrassing questions and told no tales were its mainstay.

It was more, though, than a mere dressing-station behind the crime-front; much costlier, far more intricate operative services than bullet extractions were available and nowadays more and more frequently called upon. Long ago whispers had spread Dr. Erwin Hoband's fame as an ace at plastic surgery. Quite often men who came to him with one face left with another, so little resembling their former selves that best friends and worst enemies would alike be prone to pass them by without a second glance. There were stories told——

Routine. Hoband, for a fact, had only the vaguest curiosity concerning the how, where and why of the bullet he had taken from the current client's shoulder, now held under an eddy of cigarette smoke in an open hand.

"The point is," he said, "I've got to protect myself. You tell me it was an accident, and we let it go at that. You tell me your name is James Troy, so Troy it is. But you understand I've got to be careful. One thing I must know is how you got here. That is vital. I didn't see a car. Didn't hear one."

Pryor, lifting himself higher on the pillows, winced and then smiled. He was young, clean-cut; would carry off a dinner-coat very well, Hoband thought—fit in almost anywhere.

"You'd have damn good eyes and ears if you had," he said. "I left the machine a good half mile away. Hoofed it from there. Dragged myself. Nobody saw me coming. Nobody could ever trace me—if anybody, I mean, was looking to. No little red drops. The rain mopped 'em up, sure."

Hoband nodded. "It would have." Then in afterthought he asked, "Whose car?"

"Search me," grunted Pryor, and the pale grin gleamed again. "Had to have an ambulance, so I borrowed it. That part's all right. The bus wasn't harmed any. There won't be an inquest over it."

His view for the next long minute was of an exceedingly well-draped tweed back. Hoband had walked to a window and stood gazing silently at that distant glowing skyline. His brain was turning over fast. At 4 A.M. a glimpse of a thick roll of bills flashed in a muscular bronzed hand had sufficed to start the emergency surgical machinery, but 4 P.M. found the surgeon shrewdly a man of business.

He knew now—why shouldn't he, with the owner dead to the world all those hours?—that there was nearly two thousand dollars in the yellow roll. His problem was, how stiff a tariff would the traffic bear? It was best, he had found, to have a clean-cut understanding on fees as early as might be; that way later bitterness was completely avoided.

His face when he turned it again toward the bed was serious—studiously so.

"To be frank with you, Troy," he said, "I'll be taking a bigger risk than I like to. If you had connections in Drummond—the right connections—it would be something else again. I'd feel that I had support forthcoming in case the authorities should get wind of this accident of yours and find you here. Pretty damned rough on me, that would be. A heavy fine and

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terrifically bad publicity, best I could look for. And the medical association——"

He stopped. "James Troy," looking only bored, had shrugged the good shoulder. He said wearily:

"It's a grand speech, Doc—but come to cases. You ought to know as well as I do that I had nineteen hundred plus in my pants when I hit the night-bell. I'll have

my bad news with nothing on the side. Let's get it over. How much?"

Downstairs a phone-bell jingled as Hoband, bowled down, rubbed his long sharp chin. His deep set eyes sparked.

"You know," he said, stiffening, "what the law is. Doctors are required to report every gunshot wound that comes their way. Candidly, I'd be a great deal better pleased if I'd never seen you."

The door was opening—Gwen.

"*Evening Herald* on the wire, Doctor." Her blue eyes flecked Pryor, and her voice lowered. "They want to know," she added softly, "if anybody's called here to be treated for a bullet wound. A young man, nice-looking, with dark hair and eyes, and fine parlor manners."

CHAPTER II

FOR THE "SQUEAL BOOK"

DWINDLING day had left the little park outside Drummond police headquarters a pool of shadows. It was the exact minute of sunset, and the sudden crash reverberating through the upper story of that squat red-brick building might well have been the detonation of a sunset gun.

Captain Henry Grout, chief of detectives, stooped to right the tall brass cuspidor that his feet had struck and startlingly rung upon in their abrupt plummeting from the desk-pull. His half-smoked cigar, cold at one end, chewed soggy at the other, slipped its moorings and rolled away unregarded. His voice, habitually slow, rumbling, burst forth in an amazed shrill blurt.

"What's that again? Snatched? *You?*"

Across the park a lofty electric sign sprang aflame in the twilight. On the roof of Drummond's newest and best hotel it flashed out its name: "BARING." That also, and by no coincidence, was the name of the grim-faced, youngish man who had just dropped into a chair opposite Grout's. He was George Baring, last of one of Drummond's pioneer families—through recent inheritance the hotel's owner.

He repeated, "Snatched! Yes; I guess that's a better word for it than kidnapped. When a man walking along a street in residential Drummond is yanked without a hello or by-your-leave into a car he damned well has no desire to enter, when he's knocked around, forcibly detained, threatened with God knows what tortures until he's ready to pay a price for his liberty—quite right, Captain, snatched he's been."

Henry Grout, who called his "the toughest police job in America," and stood for quote on it, touched off a replacement perfecto while he stared.

He swore, slapped a fat hand at the buzzer-block by his blotter, and was swearing again as the door swung inward.

"Hi, Ruckam!" he roared. "Listen to this. Mr. Baring—*Mr. George Baring*—reports he's been snatched!" Then he said with a touch of formality and a wave of the speckled cigar, "Mr. Baring, Lieutenant Ruckam. He's my right bower, the lieutenant is. In the know on everything."

Young for his rank, Ruckam was heavy-shouldered, heavy-jawed. His eyes and his cigarette sparked all at once, three points of a triangle glinting through the gloom of Grout's long office.

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"Hell you say!" he exploded. "Not here in Drummond!"

Baring met him with a quick, cool nod as he strode on to the desk.

"In the heart of Drummond," he said, "no later in the day than this." His jaw clicked and his voice went hard. "And God help poor Drummond," he said, "when its streets aren't safe at quarter to five in the afternoon!"

IT HAD happened in Latham Boulevard, not the most exclusive of the city's avenues, but one of well-kept apartment houses. A good neighborhood.

Baring, with a call to pay there, had elected to travel in a taxi instead of his own car. His thought was that he would use another cab returning downtown, and none being in sight in the boulevard at the conclusion of his visit he had started to walk toward a nearby car line.

"I had covered not quite two blocks," he said, "when a sedan that had evidently been trailing me swooped into the curb and stopped. It was dusk out in the middle of the boulevard and the trees made the sidewalks darker.

"The men in the sedan had picked their time and spot. There were three of them, the driver and two others who came leaping at me. One pinned my arms behind my back, the second jabbed a gun in my ribs and clapped his empty hand over my mouth. Clapped it there hard enough to jar a tooth loose.

"People all around, too. In the block ahead, the block behind, and across the boulevard. But they had me in their car like greased lightning. No, I didn't call for help. They made sure I wouldn't, once the sedan's door slammed on me. Just you try shouting sometime, Grout, with a rolled-up handkerchief in your mouth. It's one thing I'll testify can't be done. You fill your lungs and let go with every ounce of steam you've got, and all that comes out is a feeble little glug. It doesn't get you anywhere."

Nodding, Ruckham wore a rocky grin. "I've heard tell it don't," he said.

Grout grunted. "Butt out, Bill. This is the damnedest thing I ever listened to as long as I been sitting in this chair. Go ahead, Mr. Baring. Then what?"

"Blinders," said Baring. "They taped my eyes first, then my wrists. And kept thinking up and suggesting a lot of unpleasant things they'd do to me if I didn't stay docile.

"The ride lasted—I don't know—hours, I'd swear. In between threats the snatchers explained just what the program was and named the ransom. It was going to cost me just fifty thousand dollars, they said, for taking that stroll on Latham Boulevard. I was going to pay and keep my mouth shut about it. Or else."

"Son of a blister!" breathed Lieutenant Ruckam. "And they made you write the ransom notes yourself, I bet!"

Baring shook his head.

"No notes. It was a smooth game; I'll have to admit it. Murderously rough in spots, but smooth in the scheming. They forced me to use the telephone, make such calls as I would if I had been called suddenly out of the city on business I felt had better be kept strictly to myself. Yes, I obliged. I maintained for a while that I wouldn't—but I did."

Lifting his right hand, Baring held it palm up under the desk lamp Grout had switched on a moment earlier. The skin at the finger tips was white, new skin.

"I could show you the same thing on most of my toes," he said quietly. "Burns. They do it with the ends of lighted cigarettes. Derives from the Chinese, I suppose. You take so much of it—and then you're striving to please."

SO BARING, still blindfolded at the long ride's end, tortured finally into acquiescence, had made two phone calls late that evening. The big Baring town house, out in the highland section that plebeian Drummond knew as Silver Spoon Hill, was still his home, although death had left him

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alone there. When he told the butler not to expect him for several days, "family" obligations had been discharged. After that he had called his late father's secretary, Jonas Lovelace, now in directive charge of the Baring real estate interests.

"I told Mr. Lovelace simply that I had an errand out of town," Baring continued. "It was all they wanted me to say—that time. The whole idea of the moment was to forestall any investigation of my disappearance. Later, in what would appear natural course, I was to call Lovelace again.

"For the second call they kept rehearsing me pretty well through the next day, and on the second day the call went through. I was in Drummond, but in what part of the city I had and still have no idea. The calls did not go through a toll operator—but Mr. Lovelace, when I called him at the estate office, thought I was talking long distance. I told him I was in Chicago, and that was good enough for him.

"I said it was smooth. Get this. My story to Lovelace—*their* story, drilled and burned into me until I could tell it backwards—was that a very dear old college friend of mine was in a bad jam in Chicago and I was there to help him. Along with that went a hint that the trouble had a financial slant, and that I might be going rather deep into my own pocket if the mess couldn't be straightened out any other way. No precise details, you understand, but gobs of splendid campus atmosphere. The script—it was exactly that—was a masterpiece. It would go in Hollywood for a movie sequence.

"That was the second call; the third was scheduled as the money call, and I was damned if I meant to make it if it could possibly be ducked. They had made me write my check for fifty thousand dollars—and they were welcome to it, for all the good it would do them. About seventy-two hours out of circulation then, I should say, I decided I'd rather go through hell than help them cash it. I'm that way, sometimes.

"Don't ask me whether it was day or night when I made my break. With my eyes sealed, I never knew which was which. All I can tell you is that I'd had three long sleeps in captivity and half a dozen terrible spoon-fed meals. Cold beans out of the can, things like that.

"I was supposed to be sleeping again, but really I was lying awake plotting mayhem and praying for a good chance to commit it. They were getting careless, and I'd worried at the tape on my wrists until I was sure a lusty jerk would part it.

"There were two keepers—Jack and Otto, if that's any help. They were the fellows who had done the original snatching. A third man came and went. He was a mystery. I never heard his name or even his voice. He evidently had the brains of the combination. The others always referred to him as the 'Main Guy.'

"So far as I know, neither Jack nor Otto ever went out for air. They took turns sleeping, and I had noticed that Otto took his rest in a big way. I'd heard Jack, the more irascible one, trying to rouse him; it took time and effort.

"When Otto turned in I gave him half an hour or so to hit bottom. Then I snapped the wrist-tape and got one eye open. The room was filthy—that's the extent of my information concerning it. Jack, in shirt sleeves, was reading a paper.

"He happened to look my way at just the wrong moment, and jumped up. Damn fool, I'd let him catch me with the tape hanging and my eye open!

"I was up before he got to the bed, and we had it. I got his throat in my hand, but not quite in time. He had let out a bellow, and for once Otto snapped out of it at first call.

"Myself, I was so busy that I didn't hear him coming. One minute I was happily breaking Jack's spine over a chair-back—and the next, a brick wall had dropped on me. I guess it was the butt of the same gun Otto had prodded me with in Latham Boulevard."

Halting there, Baring bowed his head to the desk light and Grout for the first

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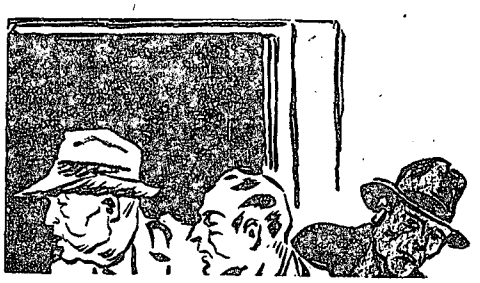
time observed an ugly long scar that extended from crown to forehead.

"Another souvenir," Baring said. "The one that convinced me that fifty thousand dollars was really a trifle, after all. I followed the example of my skull and caved. I made that third call, told Jonas Lovelace that I was still in Chicago and it looked as if I'd have to have fifty thousand dollars in cash sent on.

"I said, as per script again, that if it turned out that way, I'd send him my check and a note of instructions by a trusted messenger. Then, like a lamb, I wrote the note. Lovelace was unsuspicious, accustomed to following to the letter any and all orders signed by the name 'Baring.' He cashed the check and gave the money to the trusted messenger—who probably, from Lovelace's description, was Otto.

"At that point the ransom money—bill-numbers not noted—passes untraceably from the picture. I was taken for another



ride a few hours after it was collected. It was a ride into the country, out Bonwood way. With the car going a pretty good clip and my eyes again taped, I was chucked out onto the concrete. When I got the tape off, the machine had vanished. A blue sedan, popular make, number unknown. Can you find it, gentlemen?"

HALF gone, Grout's fresh cigar was dead in his teeth. It shifted, jutted at Ruckam.

"That's *your* job—with the whole department to help you," snapped Grout. "Find it!" The cigar swung to Baring. "When was all this? They just let you go? Today?"

"No," Baring said. "It was a week ago today. There's been a pressure of business since for me."

Lieutenant Ruckam frowned. "That's bad. You shouldn't have wasted a minute getting to Headquarters."

"I haven't wasted a minute." Baring passed seared fingertips along that shaved swath through his crisp, ruddy hair. He looked at Ruckam, then at Grout, with a chilly little smile. "I've been putting my affairs in order. You see, I'm going to see this thing to a finish!"

"Dead right," approved Grout. He threw a glance to Ruckam. "But just the same, the lieutenant's right, too. A week of delay——"

Baring cut in on him. "I know. From the police point of view it's to be deplored. But I looked at it my own way. Had to. Very explicitly I had been informed that if I squawked—that was the expression, I believe—my life wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel. I was told that the moment the snatchers were aware of any heat resulting from our transaction, they'd be after me with lead and steel, intention murder."

"Old stuff," commented Ruckam dryly. "The scare."

Baring shrugged. "It worked with me—to an extent. I'd learned to take them at their word. There was business that had to be cleared up, business that demanded my personal attention. I had to be free to move about the city, and it occurred to me that the huskiest of bodyguards would be no protection from a bullet in the back.

"Now I'm ready for them. I'm not only squawking, but I promise you I'll remain right here in Drummond, on tap, prepared to identify and prosecute the snatchers if you can round them up. I've had my house wired as tight, by Godfrey, as a tennis racket. Out there I've got a butler and a gardener and a chauffeur, good men, fellows who've been with the family for years.

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Dug in, with all hands armed, I won't need to worry."

Ruckam remarked lightly, "No, I guess not," and got up. "Just come along with me, Mr. Baring," he said. "First off, I'll show you some pictures. Maybe you can pick out Jack and Otto for us, and we could sort of sneak up on the blue sedan that way."

FIFTEEN minutes in the Identification Bureau, downstairs, and they were back. Lieutenant Ruckam hunched a thick shoulder.

"That's that. No Jack. No Otto. No soap."

Grout took it with calm.

"What I been thinking. An out-of-town mob." He took his cigar from his mouth and stared at it with a faint surprise. For at least a half hour it had held no fire, but he seemed now to make his first discovery of that. "Been doing a lot of thinking, in fact, Mr. Baring," he said, reaching for a match. "Who all knows about this?"

"The three of us."

"You mean you haven't told anybody else? Not even—Lovelace?"

"I saw no need to tell him."

The flaring match lighted Grout's blue-veined face. Here at least, was good news. He beamed.

"That helps," he said. "Helps us, and maybe helps you, too. The snatch gang might try to come back at you, at that. I tell you what—we'll hold your complaint in the squeal book."

Ruckam grinned. "The squeal book," he interpreted, "is our private complaint file here in the detective bureau. It's kept locked up, so the newspaper lads never get at it. When a squawk goes in the squeal book it's kept a secret until we make a collar. There ain't a lot of hurray in the press, see, to tip the wanted parties off and spoil chances for the grab. Get it?"

"Sounds sensible," Baring nodded. "Naturally, I expect you to proceed as you see fit. I certainly don't crave notoriety." He looked thoughtfully at Grout. "An out-of-town gang, you think? Well, I wouldn't be so sure. You see, there's one thing I neglected to mention—God knows why I should have!—that seems to me to point quite the other way."

Captain Grout came forward in his chair. "What's that?"

"This crack on the head. I went to my doctor with it—told him that I'd been in a little scrimmage. He said, 'Baring, you must've been most awfully tight if you don't know that gash has been damn well seen to already!'"

Grout stared at Ruckam, Ruckam stared at Grout; then the eyes of both policemen were riveted on Baring.

"The only clue—but it might prove a good one," Baring said. "After Otto got in his lick, it seems, they had a doctor on the job; a surgeon and a first class one on the evidence of his work. While I was picking daisies, he sewed and dressed my scalp. A local surgeon—what else? Wouldn't it be a whole lot simpler to start by finding *him?*"

Baring had left his car in the narrow street behind Headquarters. An arc light shone white upon it when, at half past five, he slipped his key into the ignition lock; but that other machine behind his stood in shadow.

Its engine was already humming as he stepped on the starter. A moment after he had turned the corner, the second car turned it. When he picked up speed, it spurted in his wake, and when for a moment other motors blocked the way of the second car the hard-jawed man beside the driver hunched anxiously forward.

"Stay with him," he whispered. "Got to stay with him now!"

CHAPTER III

ONE LOOSE END

AT SIX o'clock, as George Baring's rangy green cabriolet began its climb of Silver Spoon Hill with that lurking neighbor of Headquarters Alley still burr-

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like on its tail, echoes of the crash of Captain Grout's cuspidor were vibrating far and wide through downtown Drummond.

In his sanctum at the Third Ward Club, the Hon. Ambrose Tierney, Drummond County jury commissioner, thumped down his telephone, blew out his cheeks and gave the end of his luxuriant mustache one of those jerky double-tugs which fellow leaders of the Regular County Organization recognized both as symptomatic of inner perturbation and reminiscent of his early career as a conductor on the Braille Avenue trolley line. He boomed "Damn!" and as if in response to his own go-ahead signal, snatched off the receiver again.

On the East Side, Mr. Luigi ("Lou") Lenzo, whom the Organization had found both a munificent financial contributor and a potent last-minute persuader at the polls, heard the echo in a poker-room phone booth and emerged to announce, "Honey of a date. Cash me in."

Out West, in the really excellent little eating and drinking place privately known as "Policy Grill," headquarters of the slot-machine barons and the overlords of the numbers-game, someone just in from the street whispered, "Lid's off the snatch racket, I hear!" and a noisy table went suddenly silent.

Lou Lenzo, although the sources of his income were perennially obscure, always had plenty of money. Sallow and physically diminutive, he liked to surround himself with possessions showily oversize. It pleased him that there should be thousand-dollar bills to peep from his wallet when he paid a night-club check, large diamonds aglitter on his lemon-skinned fingers and in his cravat. The women he was seen with about Drummond were invariably large women; and the motor car which took him dashing downtown from his interrupted poker session loomed like a leviathan in the traffic lanes. Not only a bigger car than Baring's sufficiently large and expensive one, it had cost more.

Swinging through the park faced by Drummond Police Headquarters, Lenzo cast one scowling upward glance at those electric letters spelling out "BARING" and pulled in sharp at an office building in the block beyond the hotel. There he hopped an elevator and a moment later stood softly cursing in an upper hall. Gold-leafed on the door which he had tried was: "Waldo J. Cannon, Attorney-at-Law." The office was dark, the door locked.

The titanic car rolled on with Lenzo to halt again at one of those new, close-in, swank little apartment buildings on the fringe of the business district. This one had an automatic elevator and Lenzo's saffron, slim finger, viciously jabbing one of its numbered stops, had automatically made the selection. He had been here before, many times, for conferences. In the case of a client as valued as Luigi Lenzo, the office hours of Waldo Cannon, Drummond's foremost practitioner at criminal law, were in Cannon's own sweeping phrase, "from sunrise to sunrise."

Cannon was already dining. Full-bodied, plump-cheeked, he sat in bachelor state at a table by an open fire. His eyes—very lively eyes—rested just for an instant on Lenzo before he flung at his Jap:

"That's all for now."

Lenzo shook off deft Oriental hands attempting to assist with the removal of his topcoat.

"You hear, Muto?" he snapped. "Take a powder. Catchum kitchen. Scram."

A door closed, and Cannon tossed down the wine that remained in his glass.

"What is it?"

"Baring's squawked!"

Cannon pushed back from the table.

"Where?"

"Headquarters."

"Grout? Or the superintendent?"

"Grout, I guess. That's the way I get it."

A newspaper lay beside Cannon's dinner plate. He picked it up, rattled it open. His quick eyes raked the front page.

"Sporting final—and nothing here."

"Won't be," Lenzo said. "Not for a while, anyway. It's been squeal-booked."

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Cannon relaxed. "Well then? Why the sweat before the heat? I'm really surprised, Lou—a man of your poise! You ought to know the squeal book."

"It's all right, that part. I should worry about cops. But suppose Baring gets another mad on and goes to the D.A. with his yelp?"

"To young Mr. Drake? For the luvva Luella, what's wrong with you, Lenzo? What does the District Attorney's office amount to in Drummond? Just how much have our esteemed bluenoses found themselves ahead since they wangled Drake into office? Have I lost a single case to him? Has he got any more power than a silent policeman at a country crossroads? I ask you!"

Lenzo picked up the wine bottle from the table, sniffed at its neck and tried an experimental sip.

"Somebody sold this to you for real Chianti?" he grinned. "Say, Cannon, *you* ought to go to Grout and make a squawk

yourself!" He put the bottle down with a grimace and after a moment's thought reverted. "Silent policeman? Well, pass one and the next thing maybe you hear a motorcycle and get a ticket. Don't that happen?"

"It does," nodded Cannon. "But we're talking about Drake, a dummy prosecutor, tied hand and foot. In his case—tell me that!—in his case who the devil would be on the motorcycle? Grout and Ruckam, et al?"

Lenzo's voice went down a peg.

"An old guy might be aboard it," he said soberly. "An old guy with whiskers. A fella they call Uncle Sam. That's what I'm afraid of, Wally—*G-heat!* Now you've got it. That's why I came. Drake and that bird, Jackson—listen, they've got together like crackers and cheese the last week or so. That comes straight. Drake's practically been campin' in the Fed office. Now what do you say?"

Composedly, Cannon forked up the last bite of his fillet.

"I still say," he replied, "why twitter? Jackson's a dodo, shunted out to Drummond when they got tired letting him shine his pants on a swivel chair in Washington. All he's got with him is a handful of cub attorneys that never tried a case—fellows who wouldn't be earning their salt if the government hadn't pinned badges on them and told them they were bloodhounds of the law. G-heat, Louie? Don't make me laugh! There isn't a loose end for them anywhere."

Lenzo stood facing him, his hands deep in the pockets of his jaunty swing-back coat.

"Oh, yeah?" he said with his lips back off his very white and even teeth. "No loose end? Listen, Wally—who was the big-hearted guy that said Baring ought to be looked after by a doctor?"

For a second Cannon sat motionless, voiceless. Then with an alacrity belying his avoirdupois he was on his feet.

"Hoband!" he ejaculated. "Good God, I forgot Hoband! Louie, we'd better get out to him with the speed of light."

Chapter IV

Dr. Hoband's Phone Rings

NOT so many years ago, Dr. Erwin Hoband had lived and practiced on Silver Spoon Hill. He had married wisely. His wife, long a widow when they met, had means and position; and Hoband himself had those social gifts as essential to success on the Hill as professional keenness. He flourished; the best doors in Drummond were open to him when he crashed.

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There had been whispers, first, of differences. Hints that Hoband, a staff surgeon at Mercy Hospital, was rashly involving himself with a certain blonde young probationer there—a really gorgeous creature, gossip said—and that Mrs. Hoband's displeasure had led her to cast eyes Reno-ward.

Mrs. Hoband did not go to Reno. Quite suddenly she died—so suddenly as to put far darker whispers into circulation. They reached a newspaper and the name Hoband leaped all at once from the plush obscurity of the society page into the glaring Kleig-light of Page One.

The word murder was never printed. The term was always "mysterious death." From day to day things looked blacker. Hoband stayed up in the front page ribbons. He made the acquaintance of Captain Henry Grout and, much more expensively, the acquaintance of Counselor Waldo J. Cannon. He needed Cannon. The furore had resulted in a demand for an autopsy; Mrs. Hoband, its findings showed, had died by poison, and Grout had been tactlessly, relentlessly, plain in airing his suspicion that the poison was not self-administered.

In the upshot there had been a special Grand Jury. That was before Drake's term as District Attorney, and the then prosecutor had been a bosom friend of Counselor Cannon's. Deciding that Mrs. Hoband had been a suicide, the Grand Jury returned no indictment. But the subsided storm had left Dr. Erwin Hoband's career wrecked on Silver Spoon Hill—wrecked professionally and financially, both.

Mrs. Hoband, it developed, had been to a lawyer. Not about Reno, though. She had changed her will. Consequently, the tidy fortune she left had gone to nieces and nephews in the East; and Hoband, close-hauled after settling with Waldo J. Cannon, had come to the eastern outskirts of Drummond to find another practice and start life anew.

What was now Hoband's private hospital had been, in the word of a day when Drummond spoke of the East End as it spoke now of Silver Spoon Hill, a mansion. Mansard-roofed, square as a sugar-loaf, it was of the same dun brick as Drummond Police Headquarters.

Extensive lawns, not so well kept as once upon a time, surrounded the house, and over them a half dozen iron deer already rusting in Grant's day, still grazed.

One of the deer, set close to the gravel driveway, leaped up white in the beam of Lou Lenzo's headlamps as he swung between brick pillars, and he swerved the wheel and swore.

"Damn menagerie! Hoband ought to move that animal—or else hang a red light on it." Then he was pulling up at the grilled veranda and squinting at Cannon. "East End, loose end, danger end," he said low. "This guy's weak, Wally. He'd melt under heat that'd only be a summer breeze to you or I. We got to put enough ice in him to hold through hell-fire."

"Never fear," Cannon said. "He'll freeze up like Little America for us. There's nothing hotter, after all, than what a few words from me would get him—no statute of limitations on murder."

HOBAND had a log fire going, too. He stared long into it, saw many unpleasant pictures in the flames that Lenzo's blunt reiteration, "Baring's squawked!" had conjured there. Going to captive Baring, patching him, keeping his own counsel thereafter, he had let himself in for something. If the snatch trail should ever lead to the East End, through those red pillars, he stood to be crucified. Lenzo had made no bones about that when he said, "They might be coming to you, and you gotta stand pat, see? You don't know anything, Doc. All you tell 'em is that they got you wrong. And whether they take it, whether they leave it, you grab the phone and buzz Waldo Cannon."

The fee for the Baring scalp-sewing, paid by Lenzo, had been a niggardly hundred dollars. Hoband had thought at the time, although not really adding in the risk

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then, that it should have been much more. Memory of his disappointment momentarily dissipated panic and he said, with acid:

"Calling Waldo Cannon runs into money, I seem to recollect. The gap between the rewards of legal services and surgical services——"

"Please!" deplored Cannon. "That was long ago, and political palms were out. Special Grand Juries, hand-picked for qualities of easy response to leading, aren't summoned for a song. Now, of course, you're in the family, Doctor. We stand together, compact, loyal, all for one and one for all."

"If one of us ever flops on the rest," Lou Lenzo nicked in, velvet-voiced, thin-eyed, "it'd be just too bad. Bad for everybody—but mostly bad for *him!*"

He had meant, evidently, to speak further in that direction, but a phone was ringing and Hoband had stepped to answer it.

"Yes, this is Doctor Hoband," he said, and what he heard then so markedly unsteadied him that Cannon, in a wing chair by the fireplace, lifted himself out of his comfortable slump to alert attention. A little shakily, Hoband asked, "Who did you say is calling? The Department of—what?" He got it on a second telling and took a brace. "Yes," he said, in a stronger voice. "I hear you now. Go ahead."

Peering from the wing-chair, Cannon reached for a floorlamp close by and tilted the shade upward; its light, shooting to Hoband's shadowed face, showed him haggard as he stood listening.

"Why, no," he said at length. "You could have learned that by calling Police Headquarters. Anything of the sort would have been reported there immediately."

As he hung up his cheeks were gray and his forehead moist.

"Department of Justice," he said, fumbling for a handkerchief. "They——"

Lenzo stood rigid, facing him.

"The G-heat!" he ripped. "Lightning on the trigger!" He wheeled on Cannon and snarled, "Cub lawyers? Who said *that?*"

Hoband interposed quickly. "Easy, Lou! It wasn't about Baring. They were calling every doctor in Drummond, they said. Just wanted to know if I'd treated a gunshot case today."

Cannon was looking at him straight and hard.

"I heard you say you didn't," he darted. "But—did you?"

A wan smile came to Hoband's lips and his eyes turned ceilingward. "Got one in now," he nodded. "Upstairs."

Chapter V

MISSING: A SATCHEL

FOR a space of seconds there was no sound in the room except the very light one made by Cannon's well-fleshed fingers drumming thoughtfully upon his knee.

"Not," he decided, "so good. This place, until further notice, should be clean as a whistle, open at all times to inspection."

Lenzo nodded. "That's common sense, Doc. Just because the G-boys ain't askin' about Baring now is no sign that they won't be. They might happen, any time, on some rat that would tell 'em, 'Oh, yeah, that sounds like it maybe was Doc Hoband, out East.' You've got bum-wishers scattered around Drummond, Hobie. Hell, we all got 'em."

"Goes without saying," checked Cannon. "About this problem patient upstairs—who is he and how bad did he get it? Can he be shifted out of here?"

Again, as across Cannon's dinner table, Lenzo's lip had lifted in that up-and-down frigid grin.

"Never mind the 'Can he?' stuff. He's goin' to be. If it comes to that I'll take him somewheres in the boiler—take him now!—and leave him in a ditch. What we ought've done with Baring, at that."

Hoband flashed a startled glance to Cannon.

"For God's sake, what's this getting to?" he gulped. "Yes, yes—it's a case that can

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be moved. Only a shoulder wound, and a clean one."

The look of lethal ferocity faded on Lenzo's face.

"Oh, if that's all," he said. His thin shoulder twitched dismissively, and he wanted to know, "What was the rollick?"

Hoband, at a side table, was tilting a decanter. He pegged down the drink and dabbed a new bead of perspiration off his forehead.

"I don't know the man, he doesn't know me," he said. "So he hasn't felt it necessary to draw diagrams, and I haven't been inclined to pry. All I can tell you is that he turned up before daylight this morning. I took a bullet out of him, put him to bed. And there he is, doing nicely. I was a little more painstaking than usual in going through the morning newspaper, perhaps; but I found nothing that seemed relevant."

The wing chair scraped back as Cannon shoved himself out of it. "Hey, hey!" he puffed. "He's G-meat, your patient—that's plain enough now! Well, just one minute, gentlemen, and Counselor Cannon ought to be in his usual position of having all the answers!"

OUT in that mammoth motor car, carelessly flung upon the seat, lay the same last-edition copy of the Drummond *Evening Herald* which had been on Counselor Cannon's cozy fireside table, awaiting leisurely postprandial inspection, when Luigi Lenzo came bursting in to unbalance the perfect meal.

Scanning the front page, downtown, Cannon thought he had caught "G-MEN" in a headline not at the moment of particular interest; and when he came rushing back now to spread the paper under Hoband's reading-lamp his first glance told him he had thought aright.

"Here you are, Doc!" he crowed. "The local D. of J. outfit *did* have a shoot-'em-up last night. A dirty one. Two killed and one dying, it says. One fellow got away and—*holy sainted Peter!*"

Very suddenly, Cannon's voice had slid into diminuendo; the last three words had come in a strained husky whisper.

Lou Lenzo, moving toward the wide hall-door at sound of a step on the stairway, halted and turned.

"Save the emoting for twelve other guys in a jury-box, Wally!" he gibed. "Clear the tonsils. Let us in on it."

That glanced off Cannon. He was staring at Hoband.

"Doctor," he said, "what did you do with this new patient's baggage? Upstairs with him, is it, or——?"

Hoband's eyebrows crinkled.

"Baggage? What do you mean?"

Lenzo was at the door, looking up the stairs, nodding and smiling. He flung another jeer over his shoulder.

"Yeah! What does he mean, baggage? Get the picture of a nut lammin' G-heat with a wardrobe trunk on his back!"

But Cannon ignored that, too. Patiently, calmly, he persisted.

"A satchel, Doc. Didn't he have a satchel? Now, be sure."

Hoband shook his head.

"He had a pistol strapped under his coat, a pistol that still smelled smoky. Nothing else except his clothes."

The blonde nurse came in. She fluttered her blue eyes briefly at Cannon, not

quite so briefly at Lou Lenzo, and said to Hoband with the faintest of malice, "Good-looking Mr. Troy is away with the sandman."

She caught a crisp question from Cannon then, and gazed at him blank-eyed.

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"Satchel? What satchel?"

Counselor Cannon picked up his *Herald,* lifted a commanding soft hand.

"This is entirely serious," he said. "And very, very interesting. There *is* a satchel. Mark that, a satchel indubitably exists. A satchel containing almost a quarter million dollars—and that in most conveniently small bills!"

Lenzo released his hold on the slim hand of Miss Gwendolyn Martin, ex-probationer at Mercy, resident nurse now at "Hoband," as abruptly as if he had found it electrically charged.

"Say—that—again!" he begged.

Cannon pulled up his chest.

"Two hundred and forty-two thousand dollars," said he, firmly. "And this chap upstairs was the last one with it. It's that Lumin-Oil payroll, Lou!"

TWO hundred and forty-two thousand dollars! And all in bills of unspectacular denomination; all sealed into individual pay envelopes for distribution among the thousands of laborers, technicians and clerks at the Lumin-Oil Corporation's great plant in suburban Chicago.

A paymaster accompanied by two armed guards had picked up the money in the Loop, had carried it safely almost to the refinery gates. Then a sudden slash of machine-gun bullets, rippling death. Guards and paymaster were left crumpled, done for. Payroll and machine-gunners vanished.

That had been last week's story. What the Drummond *Evennig Herald* printed today was an equally gory sequel. In another suburb—but this time not of Chicago but of Drummond, farther west—a carload of locally assigned Government men had surrounded the Lumin-Oil payroll killers and battled them to the death.

There had been four of the robbers barricaded in a stone house that was like a fortress. Of the four, two were dead when the gun-smoke and tear-gas fumes cleared; men later identified as Jerry Burke and Joseph Moreno, possessors of many aliases and of criminal records in half a dozen states. A third, whose fingerprints showed him to be Anthony Scully, escaped Joliet convict, had been reported near death in Mercy Hospital, Drummond, as the *Herald's* final went to press.

The fourth man had made his getaway, and with him had disappeared a satchel which the G-men knew positively—so averred the *Herald*—had been in the stone house.

Nor was it only the quarter million dollar satchel that the fleeing robber had taken. Whirling wildly through the night with that fortune never now to be divided, he had scooped along the one reporter on the battle scene—a *Herald* reporter, a girl reporter, and, by her editor's boxed encomium, one of the Midwest's best.

CHAPTER VI

THE SAGA OF A GETAWAY

THE *Herald* had given two front page columns, each separately headed, to the story of what it termed in picturesque journalese "The Battle of Bonwood." One column presented a lurid, lusty account of the gun-fight. In the next column was the girl reporter's own first-person narration, and over it black ten-point flaunted her name.

"Sandra Sabiston!" murmured Waldo Cannon, back in his wing chair with the paper. "I'll be damned! She was in my office only a couple of days ago—been in and out a hundred times. Smooth!"

"I know," nodded Lenzo, trying to read over counsel's shoulder. "She's tops in her racket. Briniest sob-sister of 'em all. And a nice job of work—only personally I go for 'em a few inches and a few pounds more statuesque."

"Sob-sister's only half of her," Cannon said. "At heart she's a snoop. I've had some damn troublesome minutes with her."

"Here too," Gwen Martin said softly. "Sandra Sabiston found me when—you

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know, at the time of Doctor's little trouble. She was green then; but you're right, Wally. Snoop describes her." She looked at Lenzo. "A nice paint job is what you mean, Lou. If you ask me, the complexion that God gave her is simply terrible."

Cannon's apperceptive eyes touched her, touched Lenzo, touched Hoband, and for an instant clouded. He had watched this by-play between Lou Lenzo and Gwen Martin for months past. He didn't know how far it had gone or was going, but he didn't like it; Lenzo and La Martin, together, were flint and steel by an open powder barrel.

He said hastily, pointedly, *"Sandra* hasn't got that satchel, anyway—but maybe there's a clue to it here. Shut up, everybody, and listen!"

HE READ the general story first, read it aloud in a dry, matter-of-fact voice that took life only when the last adjective of the battle description had been flung and the report turned to the vanishing of the fourth robber. Speeding up then, he proceeded:

"To this last dramatic rush that carried the hi-jacker's Hindenburg Line, Miss Sabiston, the only reporter present, had been an eye-witness. A resident of Bonwood, she is well acquainted with the police of the suburb, and they had rung her up at her parents' home directly they received word of the heavy gun-fire north of the village.

"It was about two-thirty A. M. Miss Sabiston, realizing that the Drummond morning newspapers would be going to press at that hour and that in all probability she had an important scoop, dressed hurriedly and drove up to the scene just as the battle went into its final phase.

"The night was black, and rain had begun to sprinkle down as the stone house was stormed. At the moment the only facts available were those gleaned by the two local policeman, who had arrived minutes earlier but were still in their parked car. The G-men had said they had cornered the Lumin-Oil payroll mob and preferred to complete the capture without police aid.

"The number of defenders behind those stone walls was then not definitely known; the G-men, believing the three victims of their tommy-guns to have comprised the entire gang, turned to in a frantic search for the stolen Illinois payroll.

"Miss Sabiston, denied entrance to the house, stood for some time in the rain. When the downpour gained volume she hurried up the dark road to take shelter in the small coupe in which she commutes daily between Bonwood and the *Herald* office, all unaware of the extraordinary experience toward which she was speeding.

"A moment later she was looking into the muzzle of a gun held by the robber who had slipped through that deadly cordon with the payroll as the Federal men closed in. He had been wounded, but Miss Sabiston did not know it then. All she knew was what a few grim words told her. Her coupe was going away from there, going fast—and she must go along!"

Heaven-colored, but emphatically not now angelic, Gwen Martin's eyes were snapping as Cannon took breath at that first narrative's end.

"I'd kind of love it," she said, "if Sabiston came along with a nervous breakdown and *I* got the registry call to nurse her!"

"I bet she'd love it, too," appreciatively purred Lou Lenzo, flashing the one-dimension grin. "But how for the keister, Wally? We only hear about it. So far, we don't see it!"

"The satchel was in the Sabiston coupe, of course," said Cannon. "That goes without saying." He glanced over the topmost paragraph of type under the Sandra Sabiston by-line and exclaimed, "Oh, oh! Looks as if our yegg Gable sort of put the bee on Sandra. Hell, this starts off like a testimonial!"

Then again he was reading for all to hear.

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BEGINNING her own story, Sandra Sabiston had written:

"Yes, it's very, very true. In this newspaper life one does meet some terrifically interesting people. For instance, there was the young gentleman I rode with through those intermittent showers at that shockingly informal hour this morning. He was a bandit; not willingly a killer himself, I like to think, but at any rate an associate of killers. A bandit in flight from close-pressing G-men who had laid low three of his pals. Yet somehow the word 'gentleman' springs spontaneously to my finger-tips as I attempt to picture him on paper.

"Seeing him in better light, I suppose I would read sinister things in his face that were not visible during our epic joy-ride. Inevitably I would. But with just the glow of the dash-lamp on him, he looked so clean and decent—yes, and he was masculinely attractive, too!—that all my first terror went overboard and——"

He had been there by the coupe, leaning into it, groping in darkness for the ignition switch, when Sandra returned to the car.

She had felt no alarm. He was probably, she thought, one of the G-men, although why he should have come to her car she could not conjecture. When she spoke, he whipped around. For an instant he stood silent; then a pistol came into his hand.

His voice was harsh, although later she found herself fancying that it was so because of his consternation. At least it was flustered as well as abrupt.

"Now that you've had to come along, get in—*drive!*"

Less than a hundred yards away stood the Bonwood police car with those two local cops in it. Its lights were switched off, but the man with the gun knew it was there. He said with a rush:

"Don't scream! Not a sound out of you, young lady! You're in no danger—absolutely none. But you've got to stick with me." Then he gave a hard little laugh. "Might be just as well, even so, that you dropped along. Get in!"

She was to learn, shortly, what he had meant. He had been hit. The shoulder toward her as she sat at the wheel, each second taking her farther from the help that had been so near at hand, was stained crimson.

"Something to remember Bonwood by," he said. "Not much, I think—but still I'd have had to drive one-armed all the way."

Not only nice-looking, he was well-spoken; in Sandra Sabiston's romantic appraisal, the black sheep of a good family. In the role of bogey-man he appeared distinctly uncomfortable. He was at pains to be friendly, reassuring. Again and again as they drove on he told her that she was perfectly safe with him.

They were traveling back roads, muddy dirt roads, when he spoke suddenly out of a long silence.

"I've got to get rid of you somehow—but, hang it, I haven't got the heart to turn you out on a cow-path with miles to walk in the rain. No, I can't do that, and I won't do it. Not to such a good little soldier as you've been!"

And he didn't do it. He directed her to swing out of those roads that were safe for him and strike for one that would be safe for her—a trunk highway where at any hour of the twenty-four there would be cars and trucks coming along.

Rather abjectly, he apologized for having to leave her there.

"I hate this," he told her, "but it's got to be done. Can't take the risk of driving you to a town—too much at stake. Please forgive me. And for God's sake, when you flag a machine have a good look at the people in it. Don't take a chance on getting in unless you're sure that they're all right."

He switched over to the driver's side of the coupe seat then and had been out of sight for minutes when another car, Bonwood-bound, stopped at Sandra's hail.

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"I didn't know until hours later," her story concluded, "that I had been riding not only with a bandit but with stolen riches. I never saw the Lumin-Oil payroll satchel. It may have been on the floor of the coupe, may have been in the rumble. But whichever, it was gone when the Drummond police picked up the car hours later in the East End. Thinking of all the blood that has been spilled over that bag, of the three innocent men dead in Chicago, the two desperadoes dead in the stone house north of Bonwood, the third one lying bullet-ridden in Drummond, I wonder if a curse went with it. Yes, I wonder what it will bring my thug gallant who hated so to leave me in the rain!"

Chapter VII

Rooms for a Boy Friend

AS CANNON put the paper down, another silence fell upon the group in Dr. Erwin Hoband's musty Victorian drawing-room. A microphone hung there would have caught, clear, the crackling of the log on the hearth and the ticking of

a clock; for a long, rapt minute there was nothing else for the sound-track.

Cannon spoke softly: "Four minds with but a single thought, eh?"

"Two hundred and forty-two grand," murmured Lou Lenzo. "Too much for one guy to have all to himself."

"Precisely," nodded Waldo Cannon. "That's the thought."

Hoband was at his decanter again. He poured, drank, shuddered a little, jerked erect.

"Why look at *me* that way, Lenzo?"

The little man's lip was up off his teeth, his stare steady, narrow, skeptical.

"You wouldn't fool us about the bag, would you, Doc?"

"Rot!" growled Cannon. "Our friend found a hiding place for the bag before he came here—certainly he did. Would anybody in sane mind be likely to carry a quarter million cash in among strangers?"

Lou Lenzo laughed. "Sane mind? Was ever anything dippier than this guy's play with the Sabiston squab? Him with a hot rivet in him already, and G-heat so close on his tail he could smell the ink on the John Doe warrant!"

"Just a sentimental crook," said Hoband. He smiled crookedly at Lenzo. "After all, Lou, the type isn't so rare. Even in Drummond we have 'em—fellows who lose all discretion at the swish of a skirt. Not so?"

Counselor Cannon came in swiftly on that, pouring oil.

"This is all off the line, gentlemen. Whether the patient upstairs is a new Jimmy Valentine, a plain fool for women or simply an overgrown Boy Scout is not in point. The business before the committee is to discover what became of the Lumin-Oil payroll."

Blonde Miss Martin said sweetly, "Oh, yes? Then you've given up the idea of moving the patient?"

"Oh, no!" snapped Louie Lenzo. "I know a nice place to take him—and that's where he goes."

Cannon's soft white fingers had resumed their meditative drumming on the broadcloth knee.

"Perhaps not, Lou. On second thought, if there's any official visiting here it doesn't necessarily mean a search of the premises. So long as no court order is issued and Hoband has been advised concerning his rights, the danger may be discounted. The situation has changed, considerably changed. As it now stands, I feel we might better let Mr. James Troy stay put

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for the time being." Then Cannon's eyes veered to Hoband. "In the natural course, Doctor, how long would you have kept him here? A week?"

"About that. But if infection developed——"

"Leave him to me," Lenzo chopped in, "and no need to worry about any infection. He'd be tellin' all about the satchel quicker'n Judge Magoffin ever said, 'Sixty days!'"

Waldo Cannon shook his head.

"No good!"

"Why not?"

"Too crude. This is a case for finesse, Louie. Can't you see it?"

"You think I couldn't make him talk?"

"That's not the question. What about —later?"

Lenzo threw an uneasy glance toward Gwen Martin.

"Why bring that up? I tell you, Wally, leave everything to me."

Hoband, another drink in his hand, moved into the light.

"Ladies present," he said. "If you're proposing cold-blooded murder here——!"

Lenzo's dark eyes glittered.

"Skip it for now. Some time we'll get together alone, Doc, and you can give me a couple pointers. Yeah?" He swung to Cannon. "Well, what's *your* notion?"

"To keep this last of the Lumin-Oil boys right where he is until he's ready to pull out. When he goes to his cache, as he surely and speedily will, that's our time. If he should lose the satchel the same way he got it, nobody's fault but his own. Simple!"

Lou Lenzo shrugged. "Some people might think so. Myself, I say it's taking a lot of chances with a hell of a lot of jack." He looked at Hoband, grinned. "At that, Doc, I don't suppose he'll be any too-well-heeled when you get done with him. He'll be set to streak for that big bank, huh?"

Counselor Waldo Cannon, drumming, was contemplating Miss Martin's cool profile now.

"I hope," she said softly, "you like what you see!"

"Indeed I do—always," gallantly responded the barrister. "But at the moment, my dear Gwendolyn, what I'm wondering about is the effect of your charms on susceptible young Mr. Troy. They've registered, no doubt?"

Hoband's eyes and Lenzo's, too, were intent on Miss Martin as she dimpled and slowly nodded. Both men frowned, but Cannon's smile grew wider.

"Excellent!" he breathed. "Then it all becomes just so much more simple. Listen, now!"

WHEN little Mr. Lenzo drove his stupendous automobile out past Dr. Hoband's sentinel deer it was toward midnight. "James Troy," born Pryor, still lay fathoms deep then in the natural slumber succeeding his ether sleep. He had not heard the car arrive, did not hear it go. In his first awareness he was beholding the light of another day, looking into limpid eyes cerulean and amazingly sympathetic.

He felt much better. When the blonde nurse asked, "Hungry?" his answer was a hearty one.

"I could eat," he said, "a grand piano."

She brought a tray—the first of many. Hoband came in once a day, the trays thrice, Miss Martin much oftener. At times she would stop to chat; and those times became increasingly frequent, the chats increasingly intimate. But Pryor came to the end of his convalescence still holding to himself the whereabouts of the quarter million dollar satchel. He hadn't so much as hinted at the existence of a satchel. His whole past, remote and immediate, remained a closed book to solicitous Miss Martin.

Referring to that, downstairs, on the morning of Pryor's sixth day of hospitalization, she spoke in a tone more than faintly nettled.

Hoband had asked a question, and Miss Martin replied: "I've heard of people buttoning their lip. But that confounded Troy

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—well, it's more like a zipper he's got on his!"

She wore a smile, though, when she carried in Pryor's breakfast tray; a particularly cheery smile.

"Good news, Big Boy," she said. "Doctor just told me you're ready for promotion to the out-patient class. The shoulder'll need to be seen to every few days; but practically any time you've a mind to you can put on your pants and go by-by."

Pryor nodded. "I know. He told me, too."

Miss Martin, hovering, poured the coffee. She had learned, days ago, how the patient preferred it: two lumps of sugar, plenty of cream.

"There," she murmured, and her smile went a little wistful. "Last time I'll be fixing it for you, maybe."

Pryor's eyes lifted from his grapefruit. "Oh, I don't know about that. I'll be sticking around Drummond a while, I guess. We might see each other some more."

Miss Martin twinkled.

"At breakfast time? Well, hardly!" She perched at the foot of the bed and took a cigarette from the package she had brought to Pryor with the tray. "But at that," she said, "I'm glad you won't be leaving town. I mean, it would be nice to see you once in a while. We sort of get along, don't we? Or—haven't you noticed?"

Pryor buttered toast and smiled.

"I've noticed," he told her. Then for the first time he was talking about himself—but talking with his guard still up. "Drummond," he said, "looks as good to me just now as any other place. Possibly, to get personal for just a second, a little better. You see, I was in a partnership—a kind of speculative business—and things came to a split-up. I didn't finish behind any eight ball, though; a long way from it. By and by, I suppose, I'll be picking up some new connections, getting to work again. But for a while I figure on taking things easy and seeing what comes along."

MISS MARTIN nodded. "Yes, you ought to take things easy. After that awful accident, you certainly ought. Ever stop to think, Big Boy, how lucky you got off?"

"I've thought of it plenty," Pryor said quietly; and that was all of that. He finished his coffee, lighted a cigarette. "Maybe," he suggested through the drifting smoke, "you could do me a little favor, Gwen? . . . Swell, then! . . . I'm a funny kind of bird, understand. I don't like hotels. Don't like having a lot of people around me. So what I want, here in Drummond, is a nice little flat of my own. A quiet flat in the kind of house where neighbors won't be snoopy. Would you be able to dig one up for me, you think?"

The blue eyes blinked and Miss Martin took breath; then she glowed.

"Of course! I'd love it!"

"You can get out all right?"

"That's the nicest thing about it here. I come and go pretty much as I please."

Pryor blew out a lazy smoke ring.

"I mean, Hoband wouldn't object? You see, Gwennie, once or twice I've thought——"

Smiling radiantly, Miss Martin shut him off.

"What Doctor doesn't know will never hurt him. Silly, do you s'pose I'd ever tell him anything about *us?*"

Later in the day, several hours later, Miss Martin had found an apartment. There was a living room, a bedroom, a kitchenette, a bath. The rooms had a pleasant outlook, the rent was attractively moderate, the furniture not at all bad, and the house catered to the discreetest of clienteles.

Lou Lenzo himself had recommended it. He had friends living there—living, in fact, directly across the hall from the vacant suite on which Miss Martin had made deposit in the name and with the cash of Mr. James Troy, convalescent.

Enthusiastically Sig. Lenzo had endorsed the whole arrangement. He had been present during Miss Martin's inspection

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of the rooms, and as she pattered down the stairs he remained above with the friends who would be James Troy's neighbors.

Directly she had vanished, he was back at the door of the just-rented apartment. His face was blissful.

"Three keys," he murmured as the lock clicked and the door swung open. "One for him, one for her—and one for me! What could be fairer? Huh, Jack? Huh, Otto?"

Chapter VIII

FRAMED!

BEFORE he moved into his new quarters the next day, Pryor's nineteen-hundred-dollar bankroll had been hard hit. Hoband had demanded and received fifteen hundred for services rendered, and Pryor had paid the balance of a month's rent out of his depleted cash on hand. That left him about three hundred and fifty dollars, as those others banded to despoil him of the Lumin-Oil payroll loot well knew.

"A hundred is just chicken-feed to a fellow with that payroll satchel to dip into," Cannon confidently asserted. "Give him a few days and he'll be itching for the sight and feel of the big money. Then he'll lead us straight to the satchel. Wait and see if he doesn't."

It was good theory, perhaps—but only theory. "James Troy," watched day and night by his vigilant neighbors, Jack and Otto, let a week pass and made no move to unearth the treasure. Hibernating, he wasn't spending much money and that psychological urge predicted by Cannon had failed to manifest itself. Most of the time he remained indoors. He cooked for himself, between meals killed time with magazines and newspapers, stepped out only on evenings when Gwen Martin called.

He didn't drink much, didn't talk much. Once or twice his conversation hinted at concealed assets behind him, but all Miss Martin's efforts to get him deeper into the subject uniformly missed. And there was nothing like a treasure map in his rooms; Louie Lenzo, on Pryor's evenings out, had searched every cranny of them.

At the week's end, Lenzo dropped in glowering on Counselor Cannon.

"Look here, Wally," he growled, "your dope was wrong on this bird Troy, and we might as well face it. He's a regular witch with dough. At the rate he's dribbling nickels, that three-fifty shoestring will hold him till a year from Fourth o' July. And while it holds he's just goin' to sit tight. It wouldn't be human nature if Jack and Otto didn't start napping on the job long before he makes a break. And if they're asleep when he does—where are we?"

Cannon drummed and thought. His plan for getting possession of the Lumin-Oil payroll had seemed to him, days ago, just as workable as it was simple. In the scheme, Jack Vitale and Otto Muller figured merely as biped retrievers. They would keep Hoband's ex-patient in sight until, somewhere, he dug up a satchel; then, using whatever force proved necessary, they would seize the bag and deliver it to Louie Lenzo.

The two were to do their part for a price already stipulated and would not share beyond that price when the loot was divided. Waldo Cannon, Lenzo, Doctor Hoband and Gwendolyn Martin would split the contents of the satchel four ways. And James Troy, if surviving, would be left to guess the identity of the masked pair who had despoiled him.

Yes, in blue-print the plans had been fine. Even Lenzo had admitted that. He had, on his end, guaranteed that Jack and Otto would be content with an agreed flat rate and attempt no funny business.

But with a week gone and the payroll satchel as far out of grasp as ever, Cannon himself was on tenter-hooks. He had a weakness for speculative stocks, and recently had been very much on the wrong side of the market. His brokers were pressing him and he badly needed money.

Drumming, he said, "Nobody could

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have foreseen that Troy would be this way. It's damned disappointing to me, too. If we could only find means of expediting matters——" He broke off, brightened and slapped his sharp-creased knee. "How about this, Lou? We'll start him gambling, and let the wheels take him down. First we have Gwen introduce him to Muller——"

Louie Lenzo frowned. "I get the idea, and it might be good. But why Muller? If anybody's got to know more about the game I'd a hell of a lot rather it was Jack Vitale. Well—reasons of my own."

"Vitale's face is against him, Lou. Don't think Troy would cotton to him as quick as he would to Otto. Troy, understand, is the kind who'd be a bit choosy in picking his company. And Otto makes a much better appearance than Jack, you'll have

to admit. Another thing, Muller knows the gambling clubs better. He could take Troy to Billy Fullard's and fancy joints like that. Then we'll see how he reacts when the marble spins. He ought to be cleaned in no time if he's the sucker for roulette that most of these big-time guns are."

Cannon's powers of persuasion were mighty. Using them to the full, he sent Lenzo away grinning. But at the small racket-chief's next appearance in the counselor's office on the afternoon of the second day following he wore no smile.

"Know any more good ones?" he rasped. "Oh, yeah, Troy met Otto all right. Oh, yeah, he went to Fullard's. That came off swell. But he gave the wheel a sock-in', that's what he done. He ran his roll up to a grand even and then laid off. Told Otto he always quit when he got ahead and probably wouldn't gamble again for six months."

Counselor Cannon sat back and drummed.

"Uncanny!" he murmured; and then he was beaming as a new idea struck. "Now here, Louie——"

"My ears are plugged!" Lenzo said bitterly. "One more flash from you and the guy'll be so lousy with coin he'll forget all about the satchel. I'm tellin' you flat, Wally, I'm goin' to handle Troy my own way. Nothin' will stop me!"

But the light in Waldo Cannon's eyes was undimmed.

"I've got it," he insisted. "Why the devil couldn't I have thought of it before? I suppose Troy is still packing that gun, isn't he?"

Lenzo nodded, "Sure. He *would* be."

"Then he's cooked," said Cannon. "We'll have to take the Detective Bureau in with us, and that means two more cuts. But hell! Sit down again, Louie, and bend an ear. This is a honey, smooth and official—unbeatable."

THAT evening, in aftermath and celebration of his new plan to force James Troy to his trove, Counselor Cannon entertained at dinner two whose presence at the same board would automatically have been front page news in Drummond had an inkling of it reached the press. One was Luigi Lenzo of the East Side, top-flight racketeer; the other was Captain Henry Grout of the Detective Bureau, and together they sat in amity over rich food, and over wine that even the hypercritical Louie pronounced beyond reproach.

In late afternoon, Cannon had called on Captain Grout and taken him in on the secret of the elusive satchel. One could tell such secrets to Grout. Politically sponsored by the Hon. Ambrose Tierney, whose manipulations in his key office of Jury Commissioner had made him the great joss of the Drummond underworld, the captain was safe.

Usually, indeed, he had a much deeper

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knowledge of current local crime than the police records ever showed. The thriving Drummond ransom racket, godfathered by the Hon. Ambrose, had for instance been an open book to him from the first snatch; and the fact was that it was Grout himself through whom the report of George Baring's visit to Headquarters had so promptly reached Commissioner Tierney. Friends of the commissioner's, like Waldo Cannon and Louie Lenzo, were inevitably Captain Grout's friends. They could always talk business with him—and Ruckam, Grout's man Friday, was the same way.

Ruckam now was another in on the satchel secret. Cannon's latest scheme for speeding the parting of Troy and his ill-gotten gains had called for the burly lieutenant's coöperation, too; and tonight the three at the counselor's table were waiting to hear that he had successfully discharged the duty assigned to him.

"Yes, you can depend on Ruckam," Grout said. "He gets his man—when he really wants him. Bill won't miss. Not if Muller don't, he won't." Then, "By the way, Louie, Ruckam was out to Baring's place on the Hill yesterday. Pretty near didn't get in, too."

Lenzo put his lips to a crystal rim. He sipped and smiled. Never had he meant that Baring's squawk should go unrebuked, and at this moment he had plans afoot to effect a summary and profitable revenge. The new Baring electric-alarm system on the Hill, the two armed bodyguards whom racket scouts had reported added to the Baring menage, were nothing in that scheme. Baring might have made himself impregnable—but he could be hit.

The little man gently put down his glass.

"Yeah," he said, "George Baring thinks he's as good as in Gibraltar up there on Silver Spoon Hill. Just the same, though, he's on the list for another tap. Way up at the top of the list, and it won't be long. Yeah."

Grout stared. "You're kiddin' yourself."

"Think so?" Lenzo sipped again, smiled more expansively. "Well, it might even come off tonight. What do you know about that?"

Waldo Cannon sat up straighter.

"You damn' stubborn little fool! You mean to say that after my warning——?"

Lenzo shrugged. "We had all that out between us a week ago, didn't we? I told you I wasn't goin' to let Baring get away with the holler, told you how I was goin' to smack back at him. Never mind what you said, Wally. Your way of lookin' at it, maybe it was good advice, but Baring asked for it when he squawked—so he gets it!"

The inner hall-door opened and Counselor Cannon's Muto entered, soft-footed.

"You want something, pliss?" he amiably inquired. "If complete, thanks for dish."

The sudden voice, close at his back, gave Lenzo a start.

"Nutsa for dishee!" he roared. "Scat outta here, you creepin' ape!" He tossed a grievance at Cannon as the door was closing. "You oughta put that lizard in shoes that've got a squeak to 'em, Wally, or some day he'll be sellin' you out. Don't fool yourself, he savvies English a lot better than he lets on."

Captain Grout still was staring, and the stare now was harder.

"Come back to Baring. He gets—what?"

"Another crack where he got the first one."

"You can't get at him."

"Not on Silver Spoon Hill, I can't. But that ain't what I said, Henry. Latham Boulevard's still wide open, huh?"

Grout puckered. "I don't get you, Louie."

"The girl. Helen Kent, see? The radio singer. The dame Baring called on the day we took him."

"This is all Lenzo's," Cannon said, scowling. "I wash my hands of it, Captain."

The little man grinned. "Okay, Wally. That puts it on the record. We'll remem-

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ber it when we cut the cake." He faced Grout, nodded. "Helen is George Baring's new pash—and it looks permanent. She warbles in the Sky Room at the hotel, goes on the air every night at ha' past twelve. You must of heard her."

Cannon repeated, "I don't like the idea of snatching a woman. Won't have any part of it. Even Drake could get a conviction if something slipped."

"Nothing will," Lou Lenzo guaranteed. "Anyway, she's as good as in the sack now. And Baring will pay as much to get her out of it as he paid to get himself out—pay it quicker, too. Hell, he's bought her a ring. Everything's on the up and up. They're going to get spliced when her Sky Room contract finishes. She's bound to stick it through, they say, even though a word from Baring would get her released."

Grout shook his head.

"Lay off!" he growled. "The Counselor was right as rain. Male customers, people with too much money for their own good anyway—they're one thing. But a woman-snatch squawk I'd never dare to squeal-book. Inside twenty-four hours the pappers'd have my tin—and my hide along with it."

Cannon's mantel clock was softly chiming.

"Ten!" he exclaimed. "And just about now, Ruckam——"

PRYOR also had dinner company that night, and the company had suggested Policy Grill, on the West Side, as one splendid outlying restaurant left to try.

"That nice Mr. Muller told me about it," Miss Gwen Martin had said; and Muller himself, as it turned out, was dining at the Grill.

For once Miss Martin had duties demanding her return to Hoband's at an early hour; her own disconsolate word for it.

"I must be in," she said, "by half past ten. Isn't it ghastly?"

Muller had drifted over, insisted on opening champagne. He proposed, "I'll get a taxi. We'll ride together far as Willow Street. Right?"

Right with the lady, it was right with James Troy. Just about ten o'clock he stepped out of Muller's cab in front of that quiet house in Willow Street. The two men, cigarettes sparking, stood for a moment watching the diminishing red spark of the taxi's tail-light and waving to hospital-bound Miss Martin.

Then the whirlwind.

Out of a dark doorway sprang two other men with pistols and police shields flashing—plainclothes men of the Drummond city force. One seized upon Muller, audibly and jubilantly recognizing him.

"It's Muggsy, all right, Lieutenant!"

The superior officer, also the brawnier of the Headquarters pair, had pinioned Pryor.

"Whoever this guy is," he panted, "he's got a rod under his arm. Snake it off him, Rooney, and then go call a wagon."

AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS half an hour later an owlish desk lieutenant wrote in his blotter:

"Troy, James. No. 253 Willow St. Concealed weapons. Lt. W. Ruckam."

Then in another minute a cell door was slamming.

Muller, locked in with Pryor, was both visually contrite and vocally concerned.

"Myself," he said, "I'm O. K. It's an old rap and the fix was in weeks ago; Ruckam'll find that out in the morning. The hell of it is that *you* should've got jammed. If you only knew how wormy I feel—well, maybe you can imagine. One thing, Troy, I'll go the limit for you; don't ever think I won't. But the hard truth is, you're in wronger than Ginsberg at the wake. Drummond's broad-minded a lot of ways. Carryin' concealed weapons, though—ouch!"

"Bad?"

"The toughest rap in the book. And all my fault!"

Pryor lighted a cigarette.

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"No use crying," he said. "It's a nasty break for me—but here it is." He took a few quick, nervous draws and dropped the cigarette, half smoked, to the chilly cement floor. "How's this Ruckam?" he wanted to know. "Will he play marbles?"

His cell-mate went still glummer.

"Worse and worse," he groaned. "Ruckam's mark-up is so high that nobody's found out how much he costs. Nobody *I* ever heard of."

"But they've all got a price."

Muller dropped heavily onto the hard bunk.

"I hear tell. But don't even think of tryin' to square Bill Ruckam. Like as not he'd pull a grandstand play and attempted brib'ry would be added to the rap. No, Troy; your one best bet is to get the right mouthpiece and trust him to lip you out."

"Know a good one?"

Muller brightened.

"I'll say I do. You'd never find a better than this guy that made the fix for me. If you want—why, sure! He's yours, too."

"Big shot, eh?"

"Plenty big. Listen, Troy, there's a dozen attorneys in Drummond that class as tops. My guy, he's up over all of 'em like Ringling's tent. Readin' the papers so much, you've sure seen his name. It's Cannon. Counselor Waldo J. Cannon. You'll be seein' him."

Chapter IX

SPRUNG

RUCKAM phoned Cannon a minute or two after ten-thirty.

"Your man's at Headquarters," he said. "Everything's waiting on you now."

"Nice catch," the counselor applauded. "I'll smoke a cigar here to give Otto a chance to work on him. Then I'll be over."

As he stepped back into the living room he was rubbing his hands briskly together, palm to palm, and his expression was beatific.

"Mr. Troy," he said, "is in. And that settles it. Before morning he'll be showing us the way to the Lumin-Oil payroll satchel. No question of it now."

Lou Lenzo arched his glossy eyebrows.

"Hope you're right, Wally," he drawled. "But lookin' to the past, I somehow got no faith. If you feel like backing your judg-

ment with a grand note or two, I'll lay you right this minute that it's another bust.

Cannon smiled. "I don't bet on sure things, Lou—not with friends. Use your imagination; picture the young man's state of mind, the ravages of that guilty conscience of his. To him, every step in the corridor is the step of a Federal agent coming to see what he knows about the Lumin-Oil heist and the shindig at Bonwood. Inside half an hour he'll be a nervous wreck. And when I tell him that if he can get five thousand on the line fast I can scuttle the rap before court-time—when he hears that, will he scoot for his satchel? Or will he?"

The phone was ringing again then. Cannon took a step toward it and stopped. "Hell with it! Can't be bothered tonight."

He raised his voice. "Hi, Muto, answer that. I'm out, you hear? Just out. You don't know where I am."

But this call wasn't for the counselor. Muto, at the door, said, "Cap'm—*you*, pliss!" and Grout swore and heaved his bulk upward out of an easy chair.

Secretive by long habit, he closed the door tightly behind him. His voice in the service hall was held low; only a mumbling reached the living room.

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"Must be Ruckam," Cannon conjectured. "Who else'd know Grout was here?"

The receiver jingled on its hook and the door flew open. Grout stood there with his hand on the knob, his face purple.

"Lenzo," he trumpeted, "you know an East Side buzzard named Roxie Trenti, don't you?"

The little man sprang to his feet.

"Yeah. I know Rox Trenti. Why?"

"Works for you once in a while?"

"Pretty steady, I use him."

"Workin' for you tonight, was he?"

Lenzo moistened his lips.

"Well—*yes!* Kick through, Cap, kick through. What's wrong?"

Captain Grout blew out his cheeks, deflated them, shook himself.

"Got no details yet. But Roxie Trenti ain't associated with you no more, Louie. He's on his way to a cold slab, tommy-gunned stiff!"

Moving ponderously but at high speed, Grout had snatched up his hat and coat.

"Come on, Counselor; come on if you're goin' to Headquarters!" he puffed; and at the door he turned to blaze at rooted Lenzo, "*You*—what you want to do is find a deep hole and dive before you look. Because where Trenti got it was out Latham Boulevard—see?"

FIVE minutes after a cowboy taxi dumped him and Grout at Drummond Police Headquarters, Waldo Cannon drew his first full breath since Ruckam's second phone call. The returns were in on the Latham Boulevard shooting, and by all indications the affair had been a flare-up between rival mobsters. It might mean the beginning of a new gang war; Ruckam so opined and Grout concurred. To Cannon, whether or not that was so was a matter of high indifference. So long as there was no report of an attempted kidnaping interrupted by police, no surviving accomplice captured and available for Federal quizzing, it was a good world again.

He had Muller brought out to him in the squad-room downstairs, and what Muller had to tell him pleased him still more. Troy, back in the cell, had been smoking cigarettes one after another—two or three puffs, and down they would go under heel. He was, averred the decoy, fit to be tied. He had kept insisting that he could and would pay well for his release; had repeatedly urged Muller to impress the fact on Counselor Waldo J. Cannon immediately he arrived.

Ruckam, standing with the two in a remote corner of the squad-room, listened in on that. But presently, when he had brought James Troy out, he effaced himself.

Muller stood by long enough to say, "This is Counselor Cannon, Troy. I've told him you're aces, and he'll take care of you." Then, evidently no longer under duress, he took himself off, leaving the two alone in the big, empty room.

Cannon, looking serious, asked, "What's your line?" and Pryor met his gaze direct.

"Commercial traveler," he replied, and quickly joined on. "Not connected just now, though."

"They found a gun on you?"

"That's it."

"Ever have a permit to carry arms? Anywhere, any time?"

"Never bothered with one."

The counselor rubbed his chin.

"Unfortunate—very," he murmured. "And you're a stranger in Drummond too, eh?"

"Practically."

"No helpful contacts either, then. H'm. Not so good. The thing is, Troy, they ride a man hard on the concealed weapons charge in this city. Painfully hard. It's not once in a dozen cases they even allow the option of a fine. Not once in a thousand cases—might say, never—where the gun-carrier's an out-of-towner."

"That's hell, Counselor! On a fine, anything they could sock on, I'd take a plea in a jiffy."

"No quicker a jiffy than I'd arrange it

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for you—if I could. But——" Lacking another convenient surface to drum, Cannon's thought-assisting fingers lifted to drum his cheek. His eyes lost width after a moment, and he suddenly wanted to know, "There's heat on you, maybe? You're wanted somewhere else, and you're afraid——?"

Pryor shook his head. "Nothing like that. I have no police record. That's absolute fact."

"Never been mugged? Printed?"

"Never."

"But there could be heat without that, of course."

"I suppose. But don't get me wrong here, Counselor. I've just got a feeling that I don't want to sit in a coop; not now, not any time. I wouldn't like it, and I'd pay plenty to duck it."

"What do you call plenty?"

Pryor countered, "You do the calling."

"Could you raise—say, ten thousand dollars?"

"Holy cat! That much?"

"You're in a mess, you know."

"But—ten thousand! For what?"

"In this case it's 'For who.' The only way I could be certain of beating the rap for you would be to square the arresting officers. Sergeant Rooney, between the two of us, is a fellow who'll always listen to reason. Ruckam, though, is a tartar. I'd have to reach him roundabout, bear down on him with a stamp-mill pressure. That'd call for the co-operation of one of our elder statesmen—and the elders come high, here as elsewhere. I wouldn't be sure, but maybe even five thousand might do it. Can you raise five?"

The worried young man who could raise fifty times five took a moment's thought; then a slow and chary nod gratified Counselor Cannon.

"If I've got to, I've got to," Pryor gloomily assented. He looked at counsel straight again. "Yes; five grand can be done. But the way it is, I can't send anybody for it. I've got to be loose to go and get it myself."

"If I make bail for you, could you have it in my office at nine sharp tomorrow morning?"

"Positively."

Cannon chewed his cigar.

"I'll see," he said, "what I can do. Understand, though, Troy, that you'll leave me on the spot with the bondsman if you jump. If anything like that happens, God help you, I'll pull my last wire and spend my last dollar to drag you back. Hear?"

He went out, after another word or two, to use the booth phone in the front room and seek a surety.

Big-shouldered Lieutenant Ruckam looked in a moment later, but didn't enter. He said, "Don't try to take a walk, now," and went away.

Pryor, with the squad-room to himself, lighted a cigarette and strolled over to a bulletin-board plastered with "WANTED!" broadsides and departmental notices.

A face he knew well looked out at him from the board—Tony Scully's front-and-side and his description, rushed out far and wide from Joliet months ago after the big break, pasted up here now and in a thousand other police stations while Scully lay a gasp or two from his finish in that bleak old hospital around the corner.

As he stared, Pryor was aware of some one in the door behind him. He looked around and saw, first, that the figure was a woman's. Then suddenly his heart was in his throat. The woman was young, slim; and her face, as light struck it, was one even sharper in his memory than Scully's. This was the girl in a million, the girl he'd ridden with out of Bonwood after the stone house fell to the Feds—the one girl out of all girls whom he'd never in his life forget.

He wheeled back to the bulletin-board, stood there motionless and breathless until approaching steps relaxed him.

The steps were heavy. The girl had gone on, and it was Cannon coming in. He nodded cheerfully at Pryor.

"Clap hands, Troy," he smiled. "After all, you'll sleep in a bed."

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CHAPTER X

MISS SABISTON'S DILEMMA

IN THAT brief meeting of eyes there had been a jolt for Sandra Sabiston too. For just an instant she stared at the squad-room idler's quickly-turned back; then she scuttered.

As she sped across the hall her heart was sledging and her legs seemed at the point of starting the same kind of tricks as Leon Errol's. Her feeling when she achieved the rail austerely fencing the high desk in the front room was that she had made it just in time.

She gripped the rail hard, but its support steadied her only physically. All the poise gained in her four years of knocking around Drummond for the *Herald* had suddenly deserted her. She heard herself stammering again as she had stammered on the first assignments of her cubhood.

This was a new Sandra Sabiston to the desk lieutenant with the big-lensed, tortoise-rimmed spectacles. She had said, "Th-there's a m-man in the squad room!" and then swallowed hard and gone mute. The exalted owl blinked.

"Sure, there's a man in the squad room. He's a prisoner. Another innocent client of Waldo Cannon's that us unscrupulous police are persecutin'. Nobody to get excited over."

Sandra asked unsteadily. "Persecuting for *what?*" and was amazed that her voice should have come out so faintly.

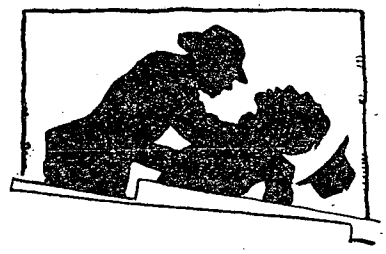
The lieutenant said, "Gun-totin'." He glanced down at his blotter and read the name there aloud: "James Troy. Brought in by Ruckam and Rooney. They got him in Willow Street—two, five, three Willow. Nothin' to it, though, Miss Sabiston." He shook his head to another tremulous question. "No; that's all there is against him. Concealed weapons is the only charge on the book."

Once more Miss Sabiston was amazed at herself, and what amazed her now was the quality of her inner response to this last information. Distinctly, poignantly, it was an emotional response; and unmistakably the emotion was relief.

A young man with goggles resembling the desk lieutenant's came along in a flurry of smoke from a drooping cigarette. He said, "Gee Christmas, Sandy! Don't you ever go home and shut the gorgeous glims?"

All at once Miss Sabiston of the *Herald* was quite herself again.

"Can't a working girl," she demanded with spirit, "go to a movie once in a while?" She looked the young man straight, and blandly, in the eye. She had not been to a movie; but putting it that way she was at least guilty of no direct falsehood. Chicane was privileged, of course, for this was a professional rival, the Headquarters man for one of the Drummond morning



papers. Sandra turned upon him a guileful smile. "I happened to hear something about a shooting," she said, speaking utter truth, "and I just couldn't go along without looking in."

The youth grinned.

"You're wasting time, Sandy. There's nothing here that won't be in the mornings—and not likely to be. It was a gang fight, the old grouch between Louie Lenzo and Mike Duffern busting loose again after laying in mothballs for a year. One of the Lenzo mugs got on the wrong end of a rattle stick—and what the morgue didn't get the street cleaners will."

HOW news of a gun fight should have percolated to the ears of a girl in a cinema audience he didn't trouble to inquire, and for that oversight Sandra was duly grateful. The fact of the matter was

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that she had dined and spent the evening in the Hotel Baring's Sky Room, and in the most dramatic of ways had got wind of the shooting there.

What newspaper Drummond called Sabiston luck had been running as strong for her tonight as it had that other night at Bonwood. Topping an excellent meal at which the Baring's publicity man had been her host, she had been regaled with a tremendously interesting eye-witness story of the Latham Boulevard affray. In consequence she knew infinitely more about the shooting than did the patronizing young man in the fabulous cheaters; more, even, than the Headquarters desk lieutenant.

Looking into the squad-room, she had been seeking Captain Grout with the makings of one more *Herald* scoop up her silken sleeve, and the convenient departure of the *Post-Record* man for a lunch-bar over the way left her free to prosecute her search with no further fear of having her bottled knowledge snatched by the morning sheets and front-paged all through town hours ahead of the appearance of the first *Herald* edition.

But now, hearing the thunder of Grout's voice somewhere up the corridor, she was conscious of subsurface turmoil. One voice insisted, "You little ninny, you've just got two big scoops here instead of one. All you've got to do is play 'em close to the vestee and the *Herald's* circulation will be hitting new highs tomorrow."

That was a voice that the four years of journalistic rough and tumble, of scooping and being scooped, had made hard. Another voice, softer but no less resolute, kept telling her: "Whatever he is, whatever he has done, don't forget that he was mighty darned considerate of *you*, Sandy Sabiston. He called you a good little soldier, didn't he? Then be one now! You're not a police woman, not a G-woman, so give him a chance. Keep what you know to yourself. Let the second scoop slide. Forget it!"

Grout appeared in one doorway, went scooting on rubber heels for another—and that other was the street door. He had his hat and overcoat on and in one more moment would be gone for the night.

Those four *Herald* years got the upper hand; Sandy darted to intercept him. She said sharply:

"May I see you a minute, Captain, before you go? I've got to. It's not just newspaper business; it's police business."

Grout told her tersely, "Well, you see me. Shoot!"

"Not here," she said. "This is very important—and absolutely confidential. Can't we go back to your office?"

Looking at her hard, Grout decided that they could. She was white, obviously under stress of great excitement; and Miss Sandra Sabiston was not a person to be excited over the inconsequential.

"Have it your way, lady," he said; and in the smoky room upstairs he thumped into his chair and waved Sandra to another. "What," he demanded, "is on your mind?"

Temporizing, Sandy fished through the chaos of her handbag and brought out a crumpled package of cigarettes. While Grout fidgetted she hunted again for matches, outwardly calm, but inwardly all at sea. Was she going to give away her hijacker Prince Charming, or wasn't she? She couldn't find the answer and, failing, she postponed the issue by compromise. She'd had plenty to talk to Grout about before ever she peeped into the squad-room; why not get that over with first?

She spoke coolly enough then. "Captain Grout, do you *really* believe there was nothing more to that Latham Boulevard machine-gunning than a fight between gangs? Haven't you reason to suspect there was still another angle behind it?"

Grout ballooned his cheeks to the bursting point.

"What," he demanded, "do you think *you* know?"

Sandra had found the matches. She lighted her cigarette and regarded the detective bureau chief with a trader's eye.

"Before I tell you," she said practically, "let's strike a bargain. The information I'm bringing to you is exclusively *Herald*

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information. So shall it be understood that the *Herald* gets the break if anything comes of it in a police way?"

Grout, sitting with his face in shadow, gave her a quick nod.

"You know me. I always play back to a paper that plays to Headquarters."

"Good enough. Then I'll tell you: Just before the shooting started tonight, a certain well known young woman of Drummond who lives in the Boulevard was set upon by two thugs. She thought it was a hold-up—but apparently it was not. The two men had a closed car parked nearby; instead of snatching her purse they tried to force her into the machine. And that was the start of the whole business, Captain.

"Other men came running from across the Boulevard. There was a free-for-all; fists flying and maybe blackjacks too. The young woman heard somebody shout, 'Get under cover!' She ran into a doorway, and as she reached it the sedan was pulling out. One of the two men who had grabbed her was on the running board, firing a pistol. That was Trenti. A few seconds later he was flat on the pavement. Another car, an open car, had shot along after the sedan, and somebody in it was blazing away with a machine-gun.

"Both cars kept going, and so did the machine-gun. Trenti was left behind. And there you are—background!"

Listening, Grout had chewed half way through a fresh and still fireless perfecto. He spat out a segment of its wrapper and said:

"Yeah, Trenti was left behind, all right." Then he bruskly wanted to know, "Is this somethin' you just made up outta your head, Miss Sabiston? If it happened, who was the woman? And what became of her? Why didn't she——?"

"She didn't have a moment to spare then. She knew that police would be coming, and she couldn't afford to be detained. After all, you know, she couldn't have helped much. The men in the sedan had been strangers to her, and so had the others with the machine-gun. So being in a rush, she got into her own car around the corner and came downtown."

"Where to, downtown?"

"To the Hotel Baring. To the Sky Room, where I happened to be sitting. She was Helen Kent, the blues singer—and she'd been afraid, of course, that if she stopped in Latham Boulevard to wait for the police she'd never get away from them in time to go on the air at midnight!"

Captain Henry Grout's swivel-chair swung forward; and once more, as on the now remote occasion of George Baring's visit, the shiny urn beside him gave forth a brazen clang. This time it was not so loud a clang, though, for only Grout's toe had struck that towering grandfather cuspidor of his.

"Miss Sabiston," he said earnestly, "I hope you ain't goin' to print this. Not, anyway, until I've had a chance to talk to Helen Kent and let her have a look through the Rogues' Gallery. I'd hate to see anything worse happen to her—and it might. Even a gang killing is murder in the eyes of the law, understand, and the guys that croaked Trenti would think nothin' at all of snatching a witness. You just hold off now, like a good girl. Give you my word of honor, the *Herald* will be more ahead if you do than if you don't."

After thought, Sandy Sabiston nodded assent, but, "A yarn like this," she pointed out, "won't keep on ice very long, you know. We'll hold it until day after tomorrow, say. That gives you thirty-six hours to do your stuff. If you feel you need more time, you'll have to make our city editor and managing editor see it your way. It'll be out of *my* hands once I've reported to the desk."

"I get you," Grout said heavily. He looked at his watch and started to rise. "I'll have Ruckam take care of this. Myself, I'm catching a train inside half an hour; got to talk at a Police Benefit lunch in Chicago tomorrow. That all, Miss Sabiston?"

It wasn't all, and very plainly he could see it. Miss Sabiston had been noticeably

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pale all through their conversation; now she was chalky. Her hand, holding a match to a second cigarette, was trembling. Grout snapped his watch closed and sat down again.

CHAPTER XI

MISS SABISTON 'VS SANDY

SINCE the *Herald* found her working on that little suburban weekly and tapped her for Drummond, Sandy Sabiston had come to picture herself as a person definitely and forever impersonal; a hard-headed, single-minded person, wedded as firmly to the newspaper business as if she had stood at an altar with it under orange blossoms and taken vows to endure till the end of time.

Sitting there with Grout's basilisk stare upon her, she recognized her error. The terrific truth flashed that she must be one of those split personalities she had heard psychiatrists talk about, for certainly a second Sandy inhabited her breast who didn't give a hoot for the Drummond *Herald* or a hurrah for the whole noble profession of journalism. And that outlaw Sandy had sprung instantly back to arms at the click of Captain Grout's watch lid.

"Go ahead!" her scornful whisper invited. "Now's your chance to send him to sure death. After all, he only risked his neck for you once; by all means, turn him in. The paper'll give you a fine pat on the back for it, Miss Sabiston. And you can be *so* proud of yourself!"

The fat watch, though closed, remained in Grout's hand. He gestured impatiently with it.

"Can't miss my train, lady. Won't it save until I get back?"

Sandy, with her eyes half shut, answered weakly, "I-it might."

The face she was seeing was not Grout's, but a younger, far more finely-chiseled, deeply-troubled face. And she was hearing again: *"I hate this. . . . Please forgive me. . . . For God's sake, when you flag a machine . . . don't take a chance. . . ."*

Then immediately a headline remembered from weeks ago swam before her. "TWO SLAIN IN $242,000 PAYROLL THEFT!" it clamored.

She realized Grout was on his feet, and in that same instant a last-month syndicate photograph, one carried by the *Herald* the day after the Lumin-Oil robbery, came up as clear to her as the damning headline. A group of three, beneath the caption, "Left-Behinds of Crime!" A tragic-faced woman, hugging close to her two weeping children; the widow, the small son and the smaller daughter of the tommy-gunned Chicago paymaster.

"I'll have to be goin'," Captain Grout said.

But he didn't go. Sandra Sabiston, distaff star of the Drummond *Evening Herald,* had snapped up from her chair and flung away her cigarette. Just short of another door of escape she stood blocking Grout again. Her last drop of color had vanished.

"No!" she whipped at him. "It won't save. Downstairs, Captain; down in the

Bureau squad-room, under this roof at this very minute, you've got the last of the Lumin-Oil payroll killers. He's the one that kidnaped me in Bonwood—a man who calls himself James Troy!"

On an evening not long since Miss Sabiston had sat ringside among the sports writers at a wrestling match, and had seen one panting Neanderthaler toss another ditto clean over the ropes. The drop had been at least six feet for the tossee, he had landed on his head and the floor had been cement. And the look on his wide

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face as he was assisted to his feet Miss Sabiston now saw in uncannily faithful reproduction on the face of Captain Grout.

The catapulted behemoth had smiled vaguely and at once reclined again. Henry Grout, though, was made of sterner stuff. He rocked but he stayed up.

"You don't mean it!" he gasped. Then he snapped open the watch, made a lightning calculation and said: "You just wait here, Miss Sabiston. I'll be back in two shakes."

Two shakes translated into something less than two minutes, and Grout was blowing hard when he returned. To his infinite relief, he had found the squad-room deserted. Dragooned by Counselor Cannon, the proprietor of a close-by saloon had been in and signed Troy's bail-bond. Troy and Cannon had both left Headquarters immediately; and Ruckam, reported the desk lieutenant, had left some time before them.

Grout shook his head at Miss Sabiston.

"James Troy's gone," he told her breathily. "Bailed out. But nothin' to it, anyway, little lady. Your eyes played some kind of a trick on you, that's all. I got the dope on this fella Troy and he *couldn't* of been in Bonwood that night. Fact is, he was in City Prison doing a ninety-day bit; wasn't turned loose until three or four days ago."

With that and a final flourish of his pot-bellied timepiece, he went clumping for the stairs.

"Not another second to spare!" he called to Sandy. "If you want to talk some more you'll have to come jump in my cab with me."

The light was off in the captain's office, the door closed and locked, the Headquarters upper hall in shadow. Standing there, Sandy Sabiston knuckled eyes that had been feeling queerer and queerer from the moment of Grout's first headlong exit. Now with that unsuspected, non-professional, wholly feminine alter ego in complete domination, they were brimming over.

"No, no!" she reedily, desperately protested. "A mistake—all a mistake. I—oh, I'm terribly sorry I made it!"

FIFTEEN minutes after Captain Grout had left Police Headquarters a neat small coupe, cream-colored, crawled questingly along the Willow Street curb. Half way into a dark and quiet block it halted; then in an upper front apartment in No. 253, behind a door with the name Troy in its card frame, a buzzer rasped.

Across the hall the slide of a metal "interviewer" drew soundlessly back and Neighbor Otto Muller, peering into the corridor, stifled an exclamation of astonishment. The Troy door had quickly opened and closed, but not quickly enough to have left Muller in ignorance of the sex of this midnight caller. Glimpsing a feminine head and feminine shoulders, he had leaped to a cynical conclusion when he turned narrowed eyes upon his companion in that dimly illuminated living room opposite "James Troy's."

"And what do you know about *that?*" he whispered. "It's Gwen Martin, Jack. Goes to show you. *Once a two-timer——!*"

Beyond the dim hallway James Troy, properly James Troy Pryor, stood with his back to the closed door and fixed upon Miss Sandra Sabiston a gaze that held full recognition but notably lacked warmth. His set face showed no surprise, for he had sped to his window when he heard the coupe stopping below and instantly had known it.

"Might have expected this," he said bleakly. Then he shrugged. "Well, you've done it. Of course, you would!"

Sandy Sabiston's cheeks had plenty of color then. They were flaming as she nodded.

"Yes; I've done it. B-but——"

"Thanks a million!" The Bonwood survivor's voice was bitter, dry, beaten, his thin smile all askew. "Oh, well—it must've been in the cards," he said. "Best thing you can do now, Miss Sabiston—best all around—is to go back and tell Scotland Yard not to come in shooting. Just remind

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'em, please, that they've still got my gun downtown."

Half a dozen stumbling words widened his eyes.

"What's that? No police with you?" More than incredulous, he was dumbfounded. "No cops?" he weakly repeated. "You're telling me you've come here alone? Now, what kind of craziness is that?"

Sandy's chin lifted; a square little chin.

"Maybe a touch of your own kind!" she told him. "The kind that made you take me to the main road when——" She broke. Tears started. "W-when," she faltered, "it might have m-meant——"

She collapsed into a chair and buried her scarlet face, huddled there sobbing. Pryor stared at her, bewildered, appalled.

"Don't do that," he begged. "Please! You've got to clear out of this."

"It's you who've got to clear out," Sandy's muffled voice wailed. "I b-blabbed. It's been a brainstorm. He's gone out of town—Grout, the detective chief! But I told him. And I'm afraid that when he comes back he'll check up on you. Oh, you must go, you *must!*"

Pryor stepped to a table that held a decanter, and filled a wine glass.

"Sherry," he said. "Drink it. You've got to tell me all about this. Everything."

She emptied the glass and sat up.

"I—I turn out to be two d-different people," she said. "One's probably depraved. But the other's *d-detestable!*"

The sherry had braced her; steadying as she went on, she hurried through her story while Pryor sat listening with his chin in his hand.

"So Grout said I was in the hoosegow that night?" he murmured at the end. "Wonder where he got that!" All their early stoniness had gone from his eyes and his face had amazingly softened. "Little soldier?" He laughed. "Sandra Sabiston, you're a whole regiment of soldiers!"

Sandy gave him a moist smile.

"N-noblesse oblige," she said. "You'll go, won't you? Tonight?"

He nodded. "I disappear—presto! It'll leave Waldo Cannon holding the bag when I don't show up in court in the morning. But on information and belief he won't be stuck very hard. Anyway, he'll be hearing from me. And you——?"

"Don't ever chance it! I'll be thinking of you. And often. Hoping the best for you—always. You're young, Jim Troy, and what's past is past. It can't be changed. But most of your life's ahead of you; the way you live it can make up for a lot that's gone over the dam. Living clean, you'll justify my coming to you tonight. Otherwise—what will I be? How could I ever live with myself?"

She was up, and her hands somehow had got into Pryor's.

"I'll live clean," he said soberly. "Depend on that. There's nothing in what you've done that you ever need lose any sleep over. For now—now and the Lord only knows how long—I'll be on the dodge. But it won't be forever. And some day, soldier, some day you and I may be seeing each other again!"

He stood at the window a moment or two later watching the coupe with the press tags roll away. He saw it turn the corner and then, back at the table, he refilled Sandy Sabiston's glass.

"To more insanity—worlds more," he said with the glass high. "Drink her down!"

And down he drank her.

Chapter XII

THREE AFTER TREASURE

AT 2 A.M. on the dot another motor came to No. 253 Willow. The Troy buzzer shrilled again and beefy Mr. Muller, at his interviewer, beheld the explanation of a minor mystery that had given him some concern during the last couple of hours.

It was a man who stood at the door across the hall this time. He wore a chauffeur's cap and when the door had opened he said, "Taxi's here!"

Muller whispered over his shoulder,

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"There you are, Jack! Now we know what he done the phonin' about downtown." He stooped for a second squint as the door slammed. "No Gwen," he reported. "She's went already, or else he's leavin' her. Come on, goop. This is the pay-off. Snap!"

Team-mates Jack and Otto occupied a railroad flat that ran through to the rear of the building, and at the rear was a fire-escape. They used it descending to a car parked in the blackness of a back-alley—this car a blue sedan of popular make which George Baring would possibly have recognized. Now, though, it carried other plates than those that Baring might have observed, but did not, in Latham Boulevard.

The sedan nosed around one corner of the quiet Willow Street block as the taxi made a turn at another, and during the next half hour the two machines were never more than a very few hundred feet apart.

Their course lay through the East End, past City Line and then over suburban concrete along which arrows marked "Bonwood" periodically appeared. Finally, after smooth miles, the cab led off into a narrow dirt road winding through woodland.

Just short of that road the sedan stopped, and Otto Muller walked up to the intersection. The taxi had stopped too. It stood in the side road, engine idling, less than a quarter of a mile from the cement. Muller called softly, "O.K.! We can hoof it!"

There was no moon, only faint starlight. Flitting over the dirt road the two from the sedan made no sound. They were no longer empty-handed. Each gripped a foot-long section of rubber tubing, common or garden hose unique in the respect of lethal leaden insets at the end. Under a swing from either of them the hardest skull would crack like a paper-shell pecan. Jack and Otto knew.

Pryor, out of the taxi, was coming back toward the main road. He moved slowly, as if orienting himself, then vanished into the woods. He had found and was following a narrow footpath, and a moment after his disappearance Mr. Louie Lenzo's strongarms were silently treading it so close behind him they could hear the crackle of twigs as he pressed on.

"Comin' out," breathed Otto, "we'll make it through the jungle. That guy in the taxi—he can just sit!"

FOR Counselor Waldo J. Cannon to be available in his law office as early as 9 A.M. was most unusual, but this morning he had been at his desk well before the hour. He had no thought, indeed, that James Troy would be keeping that nine o'clock appointment. But he did expect early news of Troy, and its failure to come through inspired a mounting uneasiness.

The counselor used his phone many times without effect. The apartment in Willow Street jointly occupied by Otto Muller and Jack Vitale, the Lenzo mercenaries, failed to answer. And Lenzo himself was to be located in none of his accustomed haunts. He, very evidently, had found the deep hole recommended by Captain Grout and pulled it in after him.

It irritated Cannon that Louie should have taken Grout's advice so literally. After all, the Latham Boulevard blow-off had been a false alarm. Taking their cue from the police, the morning newspapers called it a gang battle and Cannon didn't think they were far wrong.

Big Mike Duffern's energetic quoted denial of knowledge of the shooting did not, of course, mean a thing. Many a time Lenzo had considered muscling in on the

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Duffern policy racket, and chances were that he'd taken a flyer. In which case there was an A, B, C answer. A mobile unit of Duffern mobsters had simply come upon the Lenzo henchmen lying in wait for Helen Kent, and summarily tuned in with tommy-guns. If there had been muscling, they would.

Giving up Lenzo, the counselor tried Willow Street for a tenth time. And this time, at first blush, the result rated 100 per cent. Some one answered—and the some one was lost Luigi.

"Fine!" rejoiced Cannon.

Lenzo took him down. "What d'you mean, *fine?* What's to dance about? Me, I'm bitin' my nails here. News? Listen, Wally, you give me some!"

He had let himself into the Willow Street flat with a pass key, he said, and found it deserted. There had been just a scrawl from Vitale:

"T. left at 2. Taxi. Gwen snuck in and snuck out, late. Jack."

And no Troy, either. The smaller apartment across the hall was likewise empty; nothing there but a few pieces of fresh linen, a pile of magazines, a strew of half-smoked cigarettes and a glass with sherry in the bottom.

"He left at two o'clock, eh?" Cannon said. "What'd they be doing all this time?"

Profanely Lenzo turned the question back at him.

"How the hell should I know?"

Cannon exploded a suspicion that had been growing minute by minute more explicit: "Looks pretty much like the double-cross, don't it?"

"I thought of that. Otto I wouldn't trust further than I could throw a round-house, but Jack Vitale's absolutely O.K. As honest, Jack is, as the day is long. He wouldn't no more go south with the satchel, Wally, than a good bird dog'd eat a duck on us."

"Not too much," Cannon cautioned, "on the phone. How for leaving a note and coming down here? You've seen the papers, haven't you?"

"They're all wet. I rung up Big Mike, and he's weepin'. Swears nobody of his was anywhere near Latham Boul' last night. And somehow I——"

"Skip it, skip it!" Waldo Cannon snapped. "Better shoot downtown right now. I'll have to run over to magistrate's court to make the fix on the bond, but I'll be back pronto."

Going out he locked only his private office and when he returned, at ten, Louie Lenzo was already in the outer room.

"Squared," Cannon said. "But it'd have been a riot if Troy *had* showed up for arraignment. Sabiston's hanging around police court and the camera eye would have nailed him, sure. The way that snoop-sister keeps popping up!"

"Somebody ought to take her out and drowned her," grated Lenzo. "Might do it myself—only I'm feelin' I'd kinda like to drowned Jack and Otto first. If them punks don't have one swell excuse——" He shunted off at the ringing of a phone. "That's them now, maybe!"

Cannon had lifted the receiver. He listened, stiffened and said, "Don't hear you plain—too much talking here in the front office. Hold it until I pick up the private office phone." Then he clamped his hand over the mouthpiece and whispered, "Bounce next door, Lou, and trace this call. *It's Troy!*"

TROY talked in a rush. He hadn't been able to be in Cannon's office at nine or in court at ten. He was sorry. Things unforeseen had happened. A lot of things.

"It's a whole book! Can't stand here at the phone and even begin to tell you. Thought I ought to call you, though. So there it is. Good-bye!"

Lenzo raced in to find Cannon swearing into the dead phone.

"He's just around the corner," he said. "In a booth at the Red Star Pharmacy. I'll get him!"

But fortunate as Louie had been in making a spot connection with a down-bound

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express elevator, there was no James Troy in any of the Red Star phone booths when he dashed into the big downtown drug store. He returned winded and wroth, and Counselor Cannon's report of the recent phone conversation was only a heaping of coals upon his fire.

"And you're the guy that's supposed to be the best cross-examiner in the state!" he flamed. "Just a lug, though—ain't you?—when the other guy ain't strapped in a witness chair."

Cannon twisted his key in the door of the rear office and kicked it open.

"That's damned unfair, Lou, and I resent it," he growled. "Can I reach over the wire and take a man by the throat? I never had a chance to get in a word. He hung up on me."

"Yeah, he hung up! And who's got the satchel?" Lenzo's very good, very white teeth flashed into unpleasant prominence. "Couldn't you even get a line on *that?*"

Just then an elevator had stopped at Cannon's floor. Heavy and hasty steps sounded in the hall, and as the lawyer ripped out the first word of an angry retort—a lurid word, not for type—the outer door popped open and Lieutenant Ruckam was with them.

Argument ended, for bad news was written all over Ruckam. His eyes raked Lenzo.

"What d'you know about Jack Vitale, Louie?"

"Not anywheres near enough. You know somethin'?"

"*This!*" Ruckam's right hand had been in his coat pocket. It came out and revealed a crumple of paper tape. "Off the state police teletype," he jerked. "About Vitale. Found in the woods out Bonwood way, loaded with lead clear up to the ears!"

All teeth, Lenzo snatched and read the tape.

"O.K.!" he snarled. "This ain't Duffern's job, anyway. There's only two guys that could of shoved Jack. One's Otto and the other's Troy, and the both of 'em are on the leap. They got to be grabbed outta circulation, grabbed fast. And the best way of doin' that—sounds wild, but think it over—is to *smack out a police alarm!* Why not?"

Chapter XIII

HANDS ACROSS THE LAW

WITH Grout on tap in Drummond, it could not have happened. Nor would it, as certainly, if his prayerful last-minute telephoning from Union Station had put him in touch with Ruckam or Cannon, both of whom he had tried vainly to raise.

As it was, though, Lenzo's spur-of-the-moment scheme for rounding up the missing pair seemed feasible enough on swift discussion pro and con. Resultantly, descriptions of Otto Muller and James Troy were sparking to all radio-patrol cars within a quarter of an hour, and later being read at noon formation in the precincts.

Grout, in Chicago, knew nothing of this until he called Ruckam long distance at Drummond Headquarters directly after the police luncheon. Then instead of waiting for his night train, he snapped onto a five o'clock plane and at a little after 10 P.M. was speeding into Drummond's East End in a police car driven by a chastened and red-eared Ruckam.

It was raining in Drummond, a black, nasty night, and Ruckam's driving after a scorching session with Grout downtown was a long way under par. On his last turn he all but skidded into a solid brick pillar and then, on the final short straightaway to his objective, just missed losing a fender to a no less indestructible iron deer.

Another motor, plastered with chromium, big as a mainline locomotive, stood at Doctor Hoband's door. Luigi Lenzo had arrived in it a few minutes earlier, bringing Waldo Cannon with him; and in the Hoband drawing-room Miss Gwendolyn Martin was facing them in an attitude of virtu-

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ous outrage as the Headquarters delegation came upon the scene.

Lenzo, under her withering gaze, was shifting uncomfortably. He protested:

"Now, listen, Gwen, the Counselor only——"

"Only came one syllable from calling me out of my name!" supplied Miss Martin, not dulcetly. Her eyes, sweeping to Cannon, were the blue of tempered steel. "Now get this, you swallow-tailed transom peeper!" she said. "Whoever told you any such vile thing is the damnedest, dirtiest, lying snake. I positively was nowhere near Willow Street last night. What if I wasn't home? Whose business is it but mine and Doctor's if I went to a show and then met friends and took in a couple of night clubs?"

Cannon had no words at all. He coughed and said, "Er—er——"

Captain Grout did better. He shouted, "Pipe down, you!" at Miss Martin, and then circled the entire company with a portentous glare. "What a mess!" he rumbled. "The minute I turn my back, look what you dumb-bells do!"

Counselor Cannon flopped into the wing chair by the fireplace.

"Fact is," he alibied, "I wasn't personally so hot for Louie's big idea this morning. But he was hell-bent and——"

"And you fell. And Ruckam, the dope, thought it was just a dandy plan. And another dim-wit down on the Headquarters switchboard that'll be walking the furthest-out beat in Drummond tomorrow slapped the alarm onto the state-wide teletype—and it's outta control altogether!"

Lenzo had helped himself to a man-size drink of Hoband's Scotch. Moving forward, he still had the empty glass in his hand.

"The hell it's outta control!" he scoffed. "All you got to do is send a cancel, ain't it? Why, sure, you can call it back!"

"Not off the teletype I can't. Too many explanations to make—and all of 'em for the record."

COUNSELOR CANNON'S fingers were pattering on his knee as he took thought. Grout had phoned him from the landing field an hour ago; so Cannon knew in some part, and through him Lenzo and Hoband now also knew, what had passed between Sandra Sabiston and the captain the night before.

The barrister ceased drumming and brought the busy finger-tips together in repose.

"A question, Captain. When you speak of the record you're thinking of Sandra, aren't you? Just what action do you anticipate on her side?"

"It's past anticipatin'—it's done!" said Grout gloomily. "She must of spilled the beans to the *Herald* this afternoon. About Helen Kent and about Troy both."

"That's only your guess, of course. Maybe so, maybe not. But tell me more about last night, Skipper. Seemed to be something singular in Sandra's behavior, you say? In what way?"

"She was this way and that, backin' and fillin'."

"In regard to Troy, that is?"

"Yeah. When it came to Troy. Last thing she said was that it was all an awful miscue."

"Would it be possible that it was a case of a head and a heart at war?"

"Gimme that again."

"Well, what about chances of Sandra being, down at bottom, just a little struck on Troy? His looks and the Galahad play, you know."

"What difference? This all up the wrong alley, Counselor. She's a news-sniffer, don't forget. You couldn't figure her ahead any more than you could a cokey. But even if she didn't crack about Troy—myself, I wouldn't bet two cents she didn't—the *Herald's* certainly wise to that Helen Kent business." Grout turned to scowl at Lenzo. "How, smart guy? What you think about combinin' policy and the snatch racket in one big show now? Goes great, don't it?"

"Can that!" The little man tossed his

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glass toward a table and, missing, it shattered on the floor. "Get it out of your mind, Cap. Duffern and me have got a workin' agreement that's never been broke since we made it. If you want to know what I think—well, Muller's been gettin' chesty lately. Had all the earmarks of being about ready to pull out and set up for himself. Might of been him that cooked Trenti, at that."

"Scintillant!" murmured Cannon. "Muller being, at that moment, at Headquarters!"

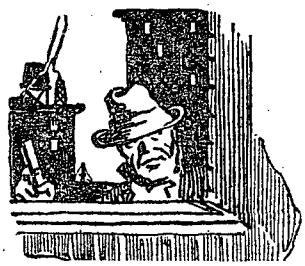
"Who says he wasn't?" demanded Lenzo. "But he could still of put the finger on Roxie. Any loose gun lookin' for a tie-up could do the rest, couldn't he?"

He had, at least, Ruckam's attention.

"Another reason you wanted Muller rounded up—right?" the lieutenant asked.

"Sure. I got a lot of things to find out from Otto—and ways of findin' them." Lenzo looked at Cannon. "Check this, to Trenti, there's been bad blood between him and Otto a long time back. And Otto knew Rox was goin' to be in Latham Boul' last night, and exactly whereabouts, and what for. It made a nice spot.

"All right. Sayin' this is good dope so far, then what? The way Otto sees it, bustaway time has come. He ain't satisfied with the five grand I'm goin' to let him and Jack split for liftin' the satchel off of Troy. Mind you, he maybe doesn't know exactly what's in that satchel, but he's intelligent enough to figure it's got to be worth more than twenty-five hundred berries. So what? He goes with Jack and they trail Troy to where he sunk the payroll. The minute he digs it up they're on top of him. They conk him, and that's all Troy ever knows for a long, long while. And then Otto ain't got anything to do but regulate poor Jack Vitale, and the satchel's all his. How does it sound, Skipper?"



Counselor. We'll say that Otto thinks he's strong enough to swing a mob of his own. He buzzes around and there's guys he sounds good to. Even guys in our own mob; but of course not top guys like Jack Vitale or Rox Trenti. Maybe he even had a deal with Nick Bloom, the bird that Rox took along with him to help snatch Helen. Looks that way; anyhow, Nick is still among the missin' and the car with him."

"You shoulda said so," remarked Grout nastily. "Why, sure, Ruckam would of been only too glad to put an alarm out for Mr. Bloom too!"

"I'm kind of lookin' around for Nick myself," said Louie Lenzo, vertically smiling. "Well, pass it at that. Gettin' back

GROUT shrugged. "Could be," he grunted. "But yes or no, it don't get *us* nowhere. We're not here to play who-splashed-who, Louie. We got a problem of our own on our hands, and a dam' serious one. It ain't theories of what *has* happened we ought to be puttin' the brain power on; it's theories of what *will* happen!"

Cannon said, "I've got a headache thinking of it. If only the alarm hadn't got on the teletype——"

"It's there," reiterated Grout. "And it'll spread through the border states; spread faster than Troy or Muller could ever travel. Muller ain't so important; if he's collared we can handle him. But Troy would be T.N.T. on our hands. To make it worse, he don't know anything about the alarm for him; he'll take chances that make it practically a cinch he'll be back with us in bracelets.

"You got a headache, Cannon? Well, I'm just about driven nuts! As sure as I try to gag the teletype, I'll have the *Herald* wantin' to know why. And Drake along

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with 'em, and the Feds behind Drake. I don't care, I tell you.

"Lookin' at what happens the other way, it's a toss-up. If Sandra Sabiston was in Magistrate's Court this mornin', she was there to get another look at Troy. When he didn't show she wouldn't miss nosin' out the bail fix—not her.

"The *Herald* run a paragraph about the teletype alarm, and she must of seen that too. With Troy brought back she won't have nothin' on her mind but the grand piece she's got for the paper. Sure as God made green apples she'll holler, 'There he is—the guy that nipped away from the G-heat at Bonwood! The guy with the Lumin-Oil payroll!'

"Then the waltz for all of us. Jackson puts the Fed pumps on Troy and finds out about him comin' to Hoband. The G office gets wind of the Baring snatch. How! Easy. Baring hears of his Helen's close call and tells everything to Drake; after that it's Drake to Jackson. Some G-man guesses that Hoband might have been that snatch surgeon, and they bear down on him. Next——"

"Hold it there!" exclaimed Counselor Cannon. "It doesn't have to go so far. Wouldn't it be easy enough to arrange to let Troy escape? Seems to me that would be the polished method."

Louie Lenzo blasted out an oath. "You and your polish, Wally! Hell with it. If I hadn't listened to you we wouldn't be in the swamp. We'd have the satchel, and no further bother from Mr. Troy. From now on—that goes for you, too, Grout!—it's goin' to be Louie Lenzo that calls the shots."

Cannon stared at him stonily.

"Call just one good shot!" he challenged.

Lenzo's curtain-like upper lip rolled high.

"Take you!" he replied. "You chump, it ain't Troy that's the real trouble spot. It's Sandra Sabiston. The only living soul, Sabiston is, that could throw Troy to the Feds. She's had it comin' a long time—and this is the time she gets it. Damn that dame, I'll fix her wagon!"

Chapter XIV

SIREN!

JIM PRYOR had not skipped town. He was not only in Drummond, but in the Drummond East End. As a matter of fact, he was actually under the eaves of Doctor Hoband's hideaway hospital; under the eaves, eavesdropping.

Rainsoaked, he stood invisible in the outer darkness close to a drawing-room window flanking the big fireplace. The window was up a few inches, and its lower sill just at ear-level for Pryor. He had been beside it even before the arrival of Louie Lenzo and Waldo Cannon in that streamlined dreadnaught out front, had heard every word spoken since they entered the room, and more than once a flinty smile had come to his lips as he listened.

Lenzo's wagon-fixing speech brought it again. *"Better look out, little man,"* ran Pryor's hard thought, *"for your own wagon!"*

This smile of his didn't last, though. "Yes, by God, I'll fix it tonight!" Lenzo had added after a moment's electric silence, and with that Pryor was smiling no longer. In another moment he heard Lenzo at Hoband's phone, and his heart skipped a beat.

"Information operator," Lenzo said. And, "Info, I want to get the *Herald!*"

Hoband told him, "The *Herald's* an evening paper. Won't be anybody in the office this time of night."

"That's where you're wrong," Lenzo contradicted. "They put out a Sunday morning paper, work all hours Saturday night. And ain't this Saturday night, Doc?"

It was—and the *Herald* switchboard was answering. Lenzo slicked out his voice.

"Miss Sabiston, please," he said. Then, after a wait, "Oh, she ain't there, huh?

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I got a piece of news for her, that's all. No; I wouldn't feel like giving it to anybody else. I kinda promised Miss Sabiston. . . . Yeah? You're expectin' her in any time? Fine! I'll give her a buzz later."

Three or four voices were stridently rising at once as Lenzo hung up. His own, stiletto sharp, sliced through them.

"No use! I'm not listenin'!"

Immediately he was calling another number, this one familiar to him and swiftly spoken.

"Hi, Joe," he snapped when the connection had been made, "I want four cars and plenty guys—fast. Want all roads outta Drummond to Bonwood covered, quick as the boilers can fly. Nail a coupe with an ice cream paint job and press tags. You get me? I want the skirt that'll be drivin' it. Dump the coop in that quarry and ——"

PRYOR had waited to hear no more. He knew that Lenzo was talking now to his racket headquarters only a couple of miles away; knew that it would be just a matter of minutes before those gang cars were rolling. Off like a shot, he had passed the last of the rusty deer and was through Hoband's gate-posts before Lenzo had come to the end of his volleyed instructions re the girl in the press-tagged coupe.

Several blocks south of Hoband's, a car line ran out to the amusement park at Drummond's eastern City Line. On one of the corners there a chain cigar shop's windows were still lighted, and the lights were a promise of a telephone.

But as he streaked for them, Pryor saw them go out. When he had covered another block an automobile that had been standing in front of the shop was moving. He shouted at the driver and was not heard. The car sped away. And there went the late-watch cigar clerk!

Pryor swore but kept going. Below, he found the corner store locked for the night. But he could see a phone, and didn't let the locked door stop him.

It was a glass door; effectively, if not neatly, his elbow opened it. A moment later, jiggling the receiver hook on the coin-box phone within, he knew he had scratched himself up on the splintered glass. One cheek was moist, and there were crimson splashes at his feet on the tiled floor.

He had called the *Herald's* number, but now the newspaper's switchboard was slow in answering. Agonizingly slow. And then—bad news! He was too late with his warning. The *Herald* operator, finally coming on, told him:

"You won't get Miss Sabiston till Monday. She reported in by phone just a minute ago and got her good-night. She's on her way home."

Blood was trickling over Pryor's lips. He brushed it away.

"Where from?"

"I think she was covering something on the Hill. Yes, that was it. Silver Spoon Hill. But she'd gone by now, anyway."

"Thanks," said Pryor.

And he meant it. If he didn't know Drummond so well, he at least had a good working knowledge of the roads around the city. With Silver Spoon Hill as her starting point, he could be sure Sandra Sabiston would head for Bonwood over Gorham Turnpike, that same highway on which he had put her down after their flight through the back country. That, anyhow, was worth while knowledge, better four to one than Louie Lenzo's.

Pryor dropped another coin—and then, as Central plugged in, he abruptly dropped the receiver. An automobile sailing along the car tracks had made a sudden swerve and with brakes squealing and rubber swooshing was skidding to the curb. It was a small blue patrol car with a policeman at the wheel, and the policeman had seen that broken door. He sprang out of the machine, and came to investigate.

The Drummond police property clerk was holding one gun of Pryor's; tonight Pryor had its twin in a holster under his almost-healed left shoulder and the motor

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patrolman, peering through the cracked glass, was the fairest of targets.

But Pryor made no move for his pistol. He moved instead—moved like chain lightning—for a door giving entrance to the shop from the side street. That also was a door of plate glass. There were two simultaneous crashes as Pryor struck it, and one was the crash of the policeman's revolver. He missed. A cigar-case shattered and Pryor, unscathed, was in the street.

The policeman had plunged into the vandalized cigar-shop and his little blue car, with its engine left running, stood hardly a dozen feet from the point at which Pryor had emerged. Pryor leaped for it. He swept it into gear, let in the clutch and sailed away while the cop, now again on the sidewalk, pumped a stream of lead in his wake.

In that still neighborhood the banging of the gun carried far. It had been heard at Hoband's, and Ruckam had rushed out to the street. He was at the curb when the police car whizzed past, so close to him that he could have touched it, and his eyes popped.

He turned to see Grout and Lenzo running toward Hoband's gate, with Cannon trailing them.

"It was Troy!" cried Ruckam. "I saw him. Troy with his face all bloody, splitting the breeze in a Department patrol car."

He raced for the big Headquarters machine, swung it up the hospital drive and stopped at the gate to snap in Grout.

"No, I'm not batty," he said. "It *was* Troy, Skipper. He's ours!"

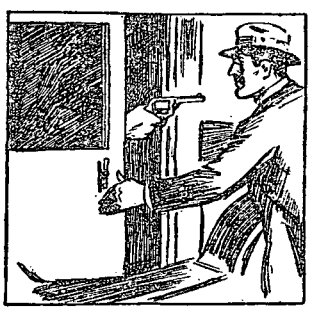
Out in pursuit whipped the Headquarters bus, and out on its tail Lenzo's juggernaut went roaring. Pryor, half a mile up the avenue, saw them coming and groaned.

He hadn't told all his business to inquisitive Gwen Martin—not half. Almost a stranger in Drummond, he still was by no means friendless there. If he could only have got that second call through before the cop showed up!

But he hadn't, and with those two swift cars hot after him he never could now. He could only hit for the Gorham Turnpike, do his single-handed best when he got there.

JUST after she had struck the wet concrete of Gorham Turnpike, Sandy Sabiston's rear-vision mirror showed her the lights of three cars coming along behind her. Two were near together, well back. The other, closer to her, was hitting a clip little short of suicidal on such a night; and that made her amazement just so much the greater when she observed it to be a Drummond police car, which had no business whatever to be outside the city limits.

Again she was amazed when the police car's siren peremptorily sounded. She knew the command was meant for her,



since the road ahead was empty, and she was in a state of complete bewilderment as she pulled over and the blue machine stopped abreast.

She started to protest that her speed had been legal; that the policeman, anyway, was out of his jurisdiction. But she didn't finish. First, it wasn't a policeman who had given her the siren, but a youthful civilian with a blood-smeared face. And secondly——

"You!" gasped Sandy.

"Me!" said young Mr. Pryor, and yanked open the coupe door. "Let me at that wheel, quick. *Quick!"*

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Chapter XV

HANDCUFFS

ABANDONING the blue machine where he had stopped it, exactly in the middle of the road and broadside to, Pryor squeezed in and the coupe left its spot of pause with a jackrabbit leap.

"No—this isn't happenstance," he said. "Just the best piece of luck I ever had. One good thing about this car, you can tell it a long way off. I steamed along just in time to see you turn into the Pike. Lord, what a relief!"

"But—" Sandy gulped, "you in a police car!"

"I was in a hurry, and it was handy. Peppy little job, too, thank God!" Pryor stepped harder on the gas. "No; I'm not hurt. Got into some broken glass, that's all. For your peace of mind—I'm taking you home this time. Straight to Bonwood!"

He looked up into the little mirror and for an instant his eyes met Sandy's there. Hers were still dazed, his were straining.

"Those cars behind—are they stopping?"

Sandy saw that they were at a standstill; their lights were blazing on the deserted police car.

"Y-yes," she told him, her brain in a whirl. "They've—no, here they come again!"

The coupe's speedometer showed 65 as Pryor nodded.

"Sure. They've figured out that I switched horses on 'em. But my little slower-up helped. They *had* to stop; could hardly have got around, either side."

Sandy Sabiston stared at the rising speedometer. Now the figure dancing under her eyes was one that she, herself, had never seen there before. She thought suddenly and icily of that rear shoe she should have replaced weeks ago, and remarked:

"Seventy-two miles an hour, and I've got a tire that's ready to fall apart."

"It hadn't better," Pryor said grimly. "We don't want to meet our friends behind. Neither of us do."

"Who are they?"

"The flower of Drummond Police Headquarters. They——"

A mighty bang blotted out Pryor's voice. Not thunder, and not a gun, but the bad rear tire putting in its oar. *Blowout!* The flying coupe sagged suddenly at the stern, and there were acrobatics.

Whatever his moral shortcomings, Sandy Sabiston saw in the next few heart-halting seconds that her bandit enigma was master of his wheel. He didn't touch the brake; he concentrated on the helm. The coupe went into a crazy slide, and at the far shoulder of the road it seemed to Sandy to lift on its haunches and spin. Then it came to all fours and straightened out on a short dash along the concrete's mathematical middle. Then it went sideways again to the other shoulder, bucked there, and toppled into ditch-water.

The coupe's left-hand door was where the roof ought to be and Sandy, looking up at it, saw hands reaching down. Pryor lifted her out of the wreck, stood her on her feet, looked at her with a tremendous solicitude and demanded, "Hurt?"

She shook her head and his eyes veered to the onrushing headlights. He snatched her hand.

"Recognize where we are? We've made the perfect circle. Come on!"

All Sandy Sabiston had noted was that they were on the wrong side of the ditch. But it appeared to be a case now of the wrong side being the right side. The bail-jumper was hustling her into the woods.

"Too bad," he said. "They'll stop and stay stopped when they see your car. But we couldn't have had the blowout at a better spot."

He was right about the pursuit machines stopping. In less than a minute both cars had reached the ditched coupe, and then their rushing lights were fixed lights. Sandy heard a voice that might have been Captain Henry Grout's—an astonished bellow:

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"Him and *Sabiston!* Can you tie that?"

Pryor had got his bearings. He broke into a jog, tugging Sandy.

"Right on the nose. We're back where we started."

Then directly they were out of the woods. Beyond a rain-beaten meadow was another road. Sandy knew that road, knew the house facing it. This was a house of stone, the identical house in which, the other week, the G-men from Drummond had trapped the Lumin-Oil payroll gang!

"Not Bonwood—but next best," panted Pryor. "We'll hole in here. Yes, you too! Don't balk, don't ask questions. Just stick with me, do what I say, and we'll come through sunny side up."

When they were at the house he said, "Doors all locked; I know they are," and as casually as he might have broken an egg he broke a window. "Up," he said, swinging Sandy off the ground. "Up and in!"

CLIMBING in after Sandy, Pryor stood staring for a moment towards the woods. Back among the trees now a light was blinking—a flashlight tracking these clear footprints they had left in the wet earth.

In one hand Pryor had a pistol, in the other a small electric torch that looked like a fountain pen. He turned to sweep the room with its beam, and Sandy Sabiston froze with horror.

The same room, this was, in which Jerry Burke and Joe Moreno had died; a shabbily furnished room whose floor still showed shuddering crimson stains. Sandy thought of Moreno and Burke; thought of Scully, also gone now. Twice in the last week, on days when Scully had rallied and was reported able to talk, she had been sent to Mercy Hospital to see him, and each time G-men guarding him had kept her from the bedside.

"Scully's not talking to anyone yet," they had said, politely adamant. "Not even to the police. Later, maybe——"

But Tony Scully had died yesterday, uninterviewed, bringing the death list of that G-heat shambles to three. And tonight his last surviving pal, back where the three had fallen, would sell his life at the dearest price his pistol could exact.

That was written in his grim face, dimly seen above the flashlight. He'd never give up alive!

Why, Sandy hollowly asked herself, was *she* there? Why hadn't she broken away, back there in the woods, rushed to the police? She didn't know. Her blind trust in this hi-jacker, this killer, had been sheer lunacy.

"Y-you can't fight the police," she chattered. "You'll be shot. Give up—oh, please!"

"I can stand 'em off," he said, swinging his flashlight. "There's a phone somewhere around, still connected. It'll bring help by the time we need it."

She shivered at the "we"—and then he had spotted the phone on a rickety table and sprung to it. He called a number—a Main number, somewhere downtown. And while he stood waiting for an answer, his light now switched off, that other electric torch outdoors came to the edge of the woods and shot its shaft across the meadow to play on the bullet-scarred stone of the house of death.

A dozen feet from the telephone, Sandy could hear the long buzz of Central's ring and finally the crackle of a voice. But the voice had been the operator's. She had said, "They don't answer"—and Pryor, after the long ringing, had been prepared for that.

One place where reinforcements might have been on tap, this one the place he had started to call from the cigar-shop below in the East End when the cop turned up, had failed him in the pinch. But he had thought of another that wouldn't, couldn't, fail.

Sandy Sabiston, hearing him calling it, could scarcely believe her ears. Almost any number in the exchange he wanted now implied a name in the Social Register, for that exchange was Silver Spoon!

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And Silver Spoon answered. Another voice rattled in the receiver, and somehow it was Sandy Sabiston's impression that it was a broadly English voice. Imagination, she thought. Nine hundred and ninety-nine out of the thousand times she had called Silver Spoon numbers from the *Herald* office, her own first phone contact had been with somebody's imported butler.

It was the right number, though. She heard, "You know my voice, Trimble? . . . Yes—right! . . . Snap Mr. Fawcett onto the wire, please. Or Mr. Ordwell." And after that, "Hello, Fawcett. I'm in another jam with the Drummond police—deadly one this time; can't spare a second for details. Grab everybody that can hold a rod and come fast. I'm in that little old stone house out toward Bonwood—yes, *same one!* O. K.! I'll be looking for you."

As Pryor hung up, the white beam lancing across the sodden meadow had found the telltale broken window.

"*That's* where they are!"—someone shouted.

The flashlight went suddenly dark, and a scant hundred yards from the house there was a babble of consultation.

Presently another voice called, "Come outta there!" and that voice was Lieutenant Ruckam's. "We've got you, Troy. This is the law."

"Not my kind of law," Pryor shouted through the rain. "Stay back, all of you!"

Off by the woods there was an abrupt hard crack and a blob of orange-hued flame flared. Long pistol range, but the marksmanship was good. A bullet came through an upper pane with a tinkle of glass and droned between Pryor and Sandy Sabiston to thud deep into the inner wall.

He leaped to the window, crouched under the sill. His pistol lifted and went *smack-smack-smack.* Acrid fumes from it choked Sandy.

Those four shots, one coming in, three going out, and then silence. Grout—unmissably Grout—roared:

"Miss Sabiston! We'll hold everything and give you a chance to come out. Oh, we know you're there, all right, Miss Sabiston!"

But on that he was slightly in error. Miss Sabiston had fainted.

THERE had been more shooting, a great deal of it; enough to bring the Bonwood police car once more tearing down Gorham Turnpike from the village to see what it was about. But the last shot had been fired minutes before Sandy opened her eyes.

She was on a couch. The room was crowded and lights were going—kerosene lamps, not very bright, but bright enough to show her that those nearest the couch were policemen. She saw Captain Grout and Lieutenant Ruckam of Drummond Headquarters; and beside them her friends of old, the Bonwood constables.

But there were many others in the room who were not policemen and she rose on elbow to stare harder at them, not sure

whether it was the low visibility that had tricked her eyes or whether something had snapped in her mind at this final shock of seeing the police and realizing what their presence meant for *him.*

One particular figure in the background held her gaze enchanted. Under prolonged scrutiny this continued to be a gnomelike grizzled little man shouldering a double-barreled shotgun and most impossibly attired in a knee-length raincoat, under which drooped many moist inches of an old-fashioned ankle-length sleeping garment.

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Heightening its unreality, the feet of this figure were incased in muddy rubber boots whose upper parts were lost under the long nightshirt. And on its head sagged a wet, limp tam-o'-shanter.

At one elbow of the gnome was an austere-looking person with sideburns and a pistol. He wore just such an open-faced livery as might somebody's butler on Silver Spoon Hill, but his costume was glaringly, fantastically, incomplete. There should have been an acre of starchy white shirt-front framed by his metal-buttoned waistcoat, and there wasn't. What appeared in the frame instead was palpably an expanse of undershirt, a shameless void of pale pink rayon.

On the farther side of the tam-o'-shanter was a red-faced man in pistol and chauffeur's cap. He was collarless and had a patent-leather shoe on one foot, a tan bedroom slipper on the other.

Then there were two very average men, dressed as average men would be, whose singularity lay in the fact that each held a small machine-gun cradled in his arm. And finally—Sandy rubbed her eyes—there was a taller man whose open topcoat revealed a quilted smoking jacket beneath. He was bareheaded, was brandishing a revolver and looked amazingly like that aristocrat of Drummond aristocrats, the millionaire George Baring.

Sandy's eyes turned back to Grout and perceived changes in him. Both in height and girth he seemed to have shrunk. His face was pasty, his eyes queer, and for a fact he looked less like his Headquarters self than the man in the gray topcoat looked like George Baring.

Someone who had been in shadow came into the light, and her heart thumped when she saw his face. It was her bandit, still very much among the living.

He stood close in front of the Drummond detective chief with his arms lifted and extended, and in that fluttering uncertain light Sandy Sabiston caught the flash of handcuffs. She heard them jingle, heard them click. And the amazing thing was that it wasn't Grout who had put them on Troy, but Troy who had put them on Grout!

Troy spoke, and his voice had a snap in it as sharp as the click of the bracelets.

"Come out of your trance, Captain! And you, Ruckam, shake yourself together and meet me right. I'm an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation—just like the gentlemen with the tommy-guns yonder—and my *complete* name is James Troy Pryor."

Chapter XVI

The Big News

THE idea of Troy being Pryor, of his turning out to be a G-man instead of a bandit and of Grout being *his* prisoner instead of his being Grout's, was a highly pleasant idea but still was not an easy one for Miss Sandra Sabiston to get used to.

But it was fact, as Miss Sabiston knew after time had passed; and, just so, the man who looked like George Baring had proved to be George Baring. And the grotesques who had arrived with Baring to stop the second Battle of Bonwood, and force Grout and Ruckam into the stone house at the muzzles of their varied ordnance, were neither figments of a distorted fancy nor refugees from some lunatic asylum afire. They were simply members of a household staff that had been in bed, or making ready for bed, when Pryor rang up George Baring's home on Silver Spoon Hill.

Quietly listening, attracting no attention to herself beyond an occasional abstracted glance from her ex-bandit boy-friend, Sandy learned the why of the Silver Spoon SOS. It seemed that the Main telephone number was the private number of G-men Headquarters downtown and that Pryor, calling too late at night for answer, had known there would be G-men available at Baring's. Because, it appeared, Baring had been secretly kidnaped and ransomed and had been under constant Federal guard almost from the hour of his release.

As to the Federal charge against Grout

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and Ruckam, that remained rather vague to Sandy. Pryor had simply told them it was conspiracy, and that the Washington jurisdiction came in through an interstate phone conversation that afternoon between Ruckam in Drummond and Grout in Chicago. And the two policemen had confessed to nothing but a deep-rooted aversion to Federal men and a determination to "get somebody's tin for this."

Pryor had used the phone several times. District Attorney Drake was on his way to the stone house and so was Federal Agent-in-Charge Jackson, finally raised. Hanging up on the last call, Pryor remarked, "It'll be a half an hour before Jackson or Drake gets here." Then he asked Sandy, "Want to go home?" and asked Baring, "How'd you like to lend me your car for that half hour?"

Rolling over Gorham Turnpike in Baring's motor a few minutes later, Pryor said softly:

"You know, I've felt mighty lowdown about holding out on you, Miss Sabiston. That first night—well, you'll never know, and nobody else will, how close I came to chucking the whole business. It was just a flash idea of my own and Jackson hadn't been so hot for it, anyway. I'd stopped a bullet, as you probably remember, and——"

He stopped to sketch a rapid picture of a Drummond that Sandy had never fully known; a city incredibly corrupt, with its politicians and many of its police officials working hand in glove with its underworld.

"Grout and Ruckam," he said, "were parties to one of the neatest snatch rackets the Bureau has ever come up against. One wealthy Drummondite after another has been kidnapped and forced to pay ransom. There've been dozens of them, we suspect, but until George Baring was snatched our office got nothing but hearsay.

"A remarkable legal mind had planned this racket so cunningly that in some cases only the victim ever knew about the snatch. The lawyer had three other principals associated with him. One was a certain machine big-wig, the Honorable—well, skip the name. Another, also passive, was Grout. The active partner was Luigi Lenzo who, by the way, was the person who started tonight's fireworks. More about that some other time.

"Baring disregarded threats and went to the District Attorney with his story. The D. A., wisely, came to us instead of going to the police and was frank to tell Jackson he didn't trust the Headquarters higher-ups.

"We promised to coöperate and began by secretly chaperoning Baring wherever he traveled and by getting on the trail of a crooked surgeon who had figured in the snatch. Of course there are many doctors in Drummond who are not over-scrupulous, but there was one on whom our suspicion finally centered. He runs a private hospital in the East End and once was in serious trouble; also he was in rather close contact with just the sort of lawyer who must have invented the Drummond snatch game—a lawyer, by the way, with a Jap houseman who's always glad to pick up a dollar or two on the side.

"Now, that's the way things stood the night we Federal men dismembered the Lumin-Oil gang and you and I took our first ride. As you know, I had been wounded. But that's wasn't serious and I had a flash thought that the bullet in my shoulder was as good as a ticket into that crooked private hospital we'd been watching. Going there wounded, I'd surely be accepted for a crook.

"That was my inspiration, net; and it was Jackson who added the payroll touch after he O. K.'d it. When we laid out the three hi-jackers we got all there really were—and we got the Lumin-Oil satchel with them. Jackson handed me money out of it—replaced, of course—to make me welcome at Hoband's. He suggested that by suppressing recovery of the payroll he might make me even more welcome. Thought there might be interesting devel-

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opments if the hospital people put two and two together and guessed that *I* had the satchel.

"There sure were. I was vamped by a beautiful blonde, convoyed by a bruiser, led into a roulette parlor and finally pinched for gun-toting. And *you*—God bless you!—your reaction last night to my arrest was the grandest development of all.

"The game, of course, was to put me in a spot where I'd stampede and dig up the hypothetical quarter-million. There was a trap for me, but I had a better one. I led a couple of Louie Lenzo's men out in this direction. I was in a cab driven by a brother G-man, and there were a couple more of the lads handy at the psychological moment. A gangster named Vitale had a hand raised to dash my brains out when somebody shot him, and——"

"Vitale!" cried Sandy. "Why, that was in today's papers!"

Pryor grinned. "Did you see anything about an Otto Muller? There was a teletype alarm out for Otto at the same time they sent one for me. But Otto—we G-men have him! And he isn't the only one we've got, ready to squeal to save their own necks. Remember the shooting in Latham Boulevard—little gun named Trenti?"

"I—I remember," Miss Sabiston said faintly.

"G-heat got him, too. And we nabbed a bird named Nick Bloom who was with him. They'd tried to snatch Helen Kent, the radio singer, but it hadn't come off. You see, it was pretty well known that Helen was engaged to George Baring, and we thought she might need a little protecting too. The thing was, as soon as I got under cover at the hospital, Jackson had sent Baring to Grout. And knowing that Grout would spread the news of the squawk——"

"Mr. Pryor," cried Miss Sabiston suddenly, "can I print all this?"

Pryor smiled again. He lifted a hand from the wheel and it wandered around her shoulder.

"No," he said. "It's got to be secret until the roundup is made. Lenzo ducked tonight when the rural cops came on the scene and started to help Grout and Ruckam smoke me out. He's got to be caught—and others—before details are printed in full. But there's one thing you can publish, Miss Sabiston—something bigger than all of this, that I haven't told you yet."

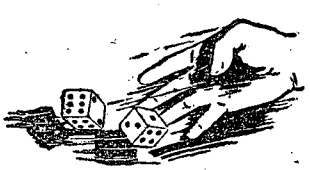
Sandy looked at her watch.

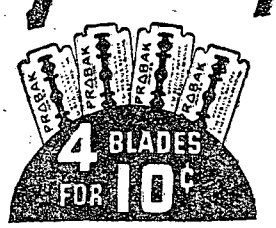
"Quick—I can catch the last deadline! What is it?"

Pryor's arm tightened on her shoulder.

"The top news is," he said, "that I love you!"

You risk good money





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THE HOUSE OF THE SPEAR

By CHARLES TENNEY JACKSON

Author of "Queer and Hot," "Let's Steal a Ship," etc.

ROTHWELL'S not a chap to be frightened," said Major Aylshire, "but his hand shook when he marked this card. Nothing but a line of pencil dots running off the Cuna Road. Doubtless it was fever, but he muttered that you were the one man who'd understand, Dan Crede."

Dan Crede held the Planters' Club card to the dull sunlight which broke through the cloudy robe of the Jamaica peaks upon the blue Caribbean water of the little river inlet where Joe Neal's schooner held to a hook in the tide.

"That's right," grinned young Joe, "if a thing is a mystery hand it to Captain Dan. This James Rothwell is what you colony people call a cattle-raiser down in these West Indies. And the doctors packed him on a Fruit Line ship yesterday, bound for a major operation in New York. Scared enough likely."

The two older men glanced silently at the owner of the *Itara*. Joe was a stout young American who paid all the bills, but who was none too serious when ashore in some obscure black men's port. The little Briton tinkled the swizzlestick in the punch, added half a lime, a jigger of pimento and drained the bowl on the after-deck drinkstand.

"Oh, likely!" he chuckled. "But poor old Rothwell added that we might find things a bit bad at his place. He warned that our coming might make them—frightful. That was the word—frightful. Then he relapsed to a coma. I had to leave him with a nurse in his stateroom, after giving my word we'd go to bother no end to help any chap."

"Frightful," murmured Owner Joe. "You say Rothwell Great House is two hundred years old—so maybe he meant the plumbing."

"Plumbing?" said the Major thoughtfully. "Come to reflect, would that account for the queer noises—but it's priceless nonsense, y'know. I rather imagine the first Rothwells who built the shack were too busy fightin' the last Caribs to worry about bathtubs. One of them was with Harry Morgan when he sacked Panama, and when the buccaneers town of Port

Great Caves Below the House Held Secrets that Had Survived from the Days of Morgan, Master Pirate of Them All

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Royal went under the sea in the earthquake, the story is that that Rothwell chap made away with no end of loot. Anyhow he retired up to this last valley of the John Crow hills and built the place. The odd thing is, in the slave revolts of the next hundred years, when the Maroons—half-bred Africans and the Carib men—came raidin' down from the hills the Rothwell lands were let alone. Likely you've heard the old yarn, Dan Crede?"

"Something about a treaty, wasn't it? All the king's troopers couldn't get the Maroons out of the hill caves, so they passed it up. And I've heard something about the hidden flag of an invisible empire."

"Oh—quite!" The Major chuckled. "Government House has smiled over that for seventy years. Priceless idea, eh? But Rothwell House—seven years ago I was recruitin' officer for the militia and I put in a week-end at the place. A bit ghastly. If it hadn't been for his good rum and a fire in the tomb of a mansion hall I'd have had my wind up. Y' see, Dan, it's a bit thick putting a chap to bed in a room that had the bones of revolted slaves cemented in the walls. No light except a candle—a tall silver piece that Morgan's men doubtless looted from some Panama church. Then downstairs, in the great hall, over the fireplace was a rotted flintlock musket and a blackwood Carib lance crossed upon it. I asked Rothwell about his relics, and the chap looked a bit wild. Likely he knew I'd heard the old women's yarns—that the old Maroon chiefs and the murderin' Rothwells made a truce and hung their weapons up as a symbol of it."

"Then the *duppies,*" grinned Joe Neal. "As I get it a *duppie* is the ghost of a long-gone Maroon warrior—a bad-fighting ghost if you get him mad. Dan says no black boy will go near Rothwell's."

THE Major shrugged. "And—no white man. Not by reason of the jolly old cockpit *duppies,* but the place is—well, out of bounds. The whites are not welcomed. The average Jamaica planter is overjoyed to get you in his place and plastered on his rum, but the Rothwells—something else, m'lad. The boys who care for his cattle and crops live in the rocks above. Old Johnny Accompoy is headman of their village—not more than forty left. Maroon men, Dan—pig-stickers—and Rothwell gives them ground for yam patches and breadfruit. That's why I can't make out James Rothwell's nonsense. It seems that his nephew, chap named Loree, came out from London on a cruise ship—just a fortnight, y'know—and poor old Rothwell goes into a tailspin. He didn't know young Loree was comin' till Rothwell himself took the Fruit Line boat in Port Antonio. Then he got word to me—I must go warn Loree, Loree must go away, Rothwell is absent, sick, and this nephew from England mustn't meddle. Dan, what can you make of it?"

Dan turned over the Club card slowly. "This much. Rothwell's in a jam. The man hasn't the guts to face something. Sick all right, but he's not tellin' it all."

The Major glanced sharply at Captain Crede. "I thought so myself. I tried to get it from him and the delirium got to his eyes. He chattered away about *Obeah* doctors, and that he's fed up on this matter of tying ribbons to a goat's horns and cutting its throat over runnin' water in a Cockpit cave. Poor old Rothwell whispered damn the goats—he was goin' to the States and let the doctors have a go at his appendix, and no ribbons on it, thank you, kindly."

Young Joe Neal took his white shoes off the polished brasswork of his schooner. "Say, Dan, when do we start? Goats and ghosts?"

Skipper Crede paid no attention to the owner of the schooner. He was watching beyond the decayed plank wharf to the grass-choked lane which straggled between thatched huts, lightless, windowless, in the dusk. The one native rumshop's door was open but it, also, was dark. The river inlet was a murmur where its swift water

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met the tides swirling past the coral ledges outside. Somewhere back of the jungle fringe along the stream was a cataract brawling out of a steep gorge; orchids, ferns and crimson lichen were a dripping barrier under the bulletwood and braziletto trees.

Dan Crede spoke quietly. "Look. Neal, don't you laugh. Major, who's the big fella?"

AGAINST the lush, wet gloom they made out a tall man astride a mountain donkey. So tall that his bare feet trailed the grass. On his head was a light blue cockade hat. He wore a double-breasted long-tailed coat which, fore and aft, gleamed with brass buttons. The coat was piped in red braid, and on each shoulder was a gilt epaulette. But from his thighs down his legs were bare. Huge black muscles, the jungle mud oozing between his toes.

"Admiral in the Ethiopian Navy," grinned Neal. "Bet he's a knockout with the high yellow girls up in the hills."

"Bad eye, Major," muttered Dan, "and he rode out of the trail to look us over. Does he mean anything to you?"

"Rippin' show," chuckled the Major. "And full African. Not a Maroon man with the Carib or Arawak blood. Looks like a doorman in one of your swanky New York hotels, topside."

"That's it," gasped Neal. "He swiped his uniform when he chucked his job. Or some Harlem club. Where's his pants?"

"Tucked under his arm," laughed the Major. "Savin' them from the bush—what?"

"Tucked in his belt is a machete," said Crede. "Under his brass-buttoned coat-tails is a gun—a big gun. Forty-five, maybe. But his eyes—he's a big *Obeah* man, Neal—if you never saw one."

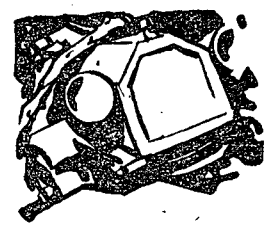
"He's a riot," laughed Neal, "hot-cha-cha from some musical show. Don't tell me he's a witch-doctor or a *duppie*. I'd hate to pay his dinner checks. He'll kill that burro in a mile."

The comedy mule turned at a touch of the rope bridle. The rider vanished up a banana cart road with the majesty of a king. Dan Crede kept his binoculars on the last glitter of gold braid.

"Aylshire," said Crede slowly, "you said there's just one car for hire this side of Port Antonio. Is the driver safe—for us?"

The little Major swizzled three tots of rum into the punch. By adding no water it was a drink that Neal turned down.

"That car, Dan—I wouldn't say it was pre-war, but close. The taxi man. Yes, he's safe—he better be. I could inform



the Crown solicitor of certain smugglin'—in and out—guns and such. A safe man, Dan—even as you or I."

They all laughed. The little Briton was in no favor at Government House, and Crede had taken many a lot of liquor, export tax unpaid, out of these obscure West Indian ports. The old trade was dead as was old John Neal, Joe's uncle, who'd been its overlord.

"All right," said Dan, "get that car tonight, Major. And make an inquiry from your smugglin' man about the big smoke who rode down to look us over."

The Cayman Island mate got Aylshire ashore in the rainy dusk. The black crew forward were well paid to take no heed what these three white men did ashore. Five of the nine had been with Captain Crede when Crede knew the feel of his own deck underfoot. Men from down the Leewards who had no use for Jamaicans.

NEAL and Crede were dining in the *Itara's* bright cabin when Aylshire returned dripping. The decrepit motor car would be waiting for them at a shed under

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the rockledge where the banana plantings ended, off the coast road where the bicycle constables passed now and then. The Major looked a bit disturbed.

"You two chaps are both right about the big fella," said he. "He's mixed in Rothwell's affairs, and he spent three years in America. Chicago—was head doorman at a Loop hotel. He was raised on Rothwell's place. Nephew of old Johnny Accompoy, the Maroon headman. My taxi man didn't want to talk, but I gathered that this chap, Frederic Zagor, has just returned—swank clothes and all. Odd thing is that Zagor returns and James Rothwell goes away in a fright."

"And this young relation of Rothwell's comes from England," said Crede. "Major, does it make sense to you?"

Aylshire glanced at Joe Neal and laughed lightly. "Dan, you've been about Dominica and Haiti. You've heard the hill drums and you've found voodoo charms hung on the halyards of your own ship in times past. You know what a black boy with some education and swank can do along with a bit of lawyerin'. Rothwell would know it all too, but young Loree wouldn't. No more than Neal would."

"Listen," put in Owner Neal, "cut me in on the dividends of this spook party. If I pay expenses I'm entitled——"

"Neal, m'lad," laughed the Major, "we love your priceless fun. But what I learned ashore was little. What you jolly Americans call 'the heat' has been put on Rothwell. A man who can't carry out some bargain his ancestors made with the pig-spearin' raiders out of the Uprocks. Dan, do you recall the time you and I took off our hats before a heathen secret altar in Guiana? The witch doctor asked me to say a good word and I repeated some Mother Goose to aid his racket. You and I are broad-minded fellas, Dan."

Dan eyed the stiff drinks Aylshire concocted, with his usual patience. Neal watered his rum. "Listen," he repeated. "You take me along and I'll call some football signals for 'em. The Princeton——"

Captain Crede cut in solidly. "Major, this is my plan. Rothwell feared we'd not be welcome at his house. So he sent me a marked trail showin' some back way in. To me, Major. Well, you drive that car in and upset it. You go to Rothwell Great House and ask help. No planter ever refuses a drink and an ox span to help a man out."

"Dan, you can't get a car to Rothwell's. Another odd thing. From the Nanny River road you take a trail over the Uprocks. The Indians traveled it for centuries. The early Rothwells would not have a road. Every building on the place was hewn from the coral by their slaves. They drove their cattle out and mule-packed their stores in. The last slave revolt was put down in 1831, but as usual, when everything along the hills went up in smoke and blood, Rothwell Great House was not plundered. Odd—what? Out of bounds for the whites, and the blacks were afraid to go near it. Neat for the Rothwells likely, but here is James, a shrinkin' violet—the last of 'em—frightened."

"Come on," said Dan Crede. "Let's go. Rainy night is right for us."

"Calls for Scotch," said the Major. "I'm takin' a flask in case we're not welcomed to Rothwell's rum cellars."

THE three, with Aylshire driving, got the car away, lightless but rattling shakily. Rainwater erupted through the tattered top. Joe Neal knew after an hour that the road was no more than a rock shelf with an unseen little river roaring in a gorge, and dripping bamboo jungle hanging from an unseen cliff. Then they stopped on a bare ridge where the mist crossed from dark to dark. Aylshire got out and Crede followed. Neal heard snatches of a conference. It seemed to be about James Rothwell who was a decent chap, and his good name ought to be protected. There were things white men didn't do however.

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"Rothwell said, tell Loree anything—do anything—to get the young fella away. Won't do, said Rothwell; out of bounds for the English end of the family." The Major came back to the car.

"Well," said Crede, "why drag me into an ancient family scandal?"

"Because Rothwell knew you were a man of action, and maybe I wasn't," chuckled Aylshire. "And you'd keep your mouth shut. Dan, it's the name you've acquired about the islands."

The two got under the leaky car top and sleepily waited for daylight. The rain stopped finally but mist drifted from an unseen valley. Joe Neal took a damp doze, and was grumpy when Crede offered him hot coffee from a thermos jug. Gray dawn was here.

"Say," put in Neal, "where do I come in on this?"

"You're a problem," laughed Aylshire. "Won't do to have you in sight if I succeed in getting help up here for the car. Lend a hand shovin' it into the ditch. I want to make work for Rothwell's witch doctors. Dan, how about Neal?"

"He'll go with me, trackin' that trail Rothwell marked on the card. Now, Major, we time this. I'll be on the ridge where I watch you go to that house—at ten o'clock sharp. If they turn you down I'll see it. If they receive you I'll see the field boys come up the hill with an ox-span. But if you enter that damned house and don't come out by noon, sharp, I'll get in there somehow."

"So will I," grunted Neal, "who says we can't!"

The Major gurgled a long drink, and they shoved the car into the dripping ferns. At nine o'clock he went down the cattle trail. Dan Crede and Neal went on along the ridge. A red sun thinned the mists, and presently Joe saw down a thousand feet across a feathery sea of bamboo tops, a slope that ended in gray rocks. Beyond these a stony pasture, with the humped half-bred zebu cattle grazing. Then stone walls, and the huts of the field workers as the mist lifted.

"A busted ranch," said Neal, "how did they make a livin' on it?"

"They didn't—and that's why we're here," answered Crede. "Got a little coffee planted, and a pimento grove. Yam patches for the hands, and that's all for a century and a half of neglect. Joe, this is a rock-cut trail we're on and it opens to a ditch almost filled with water-washed jungle mold. Leads down in the rear of Rothwell's house. A way never used by the natives, you notice? There's a reason, and badly as he hated the idea, Rothwell meant for us to discover it."

Neal stumbled under giant tree ferns in a gloom made by the great Santa Maria trees overhanging the rock ledges. Green

parrots and ring-tailed doves flew across an opening where Dan halted. He looked at his wrist-watch, then pointed downward.

The pale sunshine was on a long stone house with a high, porticoed front. Black mango clumps were about the grassless yard. Not a smoke arose from the field hands' quarters; not a black child was about the closed huts. Not a woman in the provision patches beyond.

"Scared out—took to the hills," muttered Crede. "Who did it? A house of the dead—and no wonder it broke Rothwell's nerves."

"There comes the Major," said Neal,

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"down past the cattle pens, cutting at weeds with his stick, hat on the side of his head. I bet there isn't a drink left in his flask. I hope his show isn't a flop."

The little man crossed the desolate yard, went up the steps and straight to the closed door. Crede watched with his binoculars. Then a wisp of fog drifted across for a moment. When it passed the great veranda was empty, dank, somber. Dan muttered.

"Neal, did you see that door open? Did you see a house boy?"

"Saw nothing. The Major vanished. Well, now he's by a good fire dryin' his duds and callin' for a spot of Three Dagger. He'll be good for an hour tellin' 'em of Gallipoli and the Somme. He would."

CREDE was checking off Rothwell's marked traverses. He'd been a fair jungle-tracker—as white men go—in the Guiana diamond fields. He crawled on under the dripping bush, and called Neal in a low voice. A bare rock slope, an acre wide, skirted by ditches which joined at the lower end and vanished under the ferns, was beyond.

"An old water-catchment, Neal. You see they can't sink wells in these hills. Every drop of water that falls disappears into the honey-comb of caves and then to the sea. The ditch leads to cisterns, but that wasn't what Rothwell meant. He wanted us to know there was a way of escape—a secret path—in case of—well, trouble."

"The first man that built a house in this nest of rocks didn't figure anything but trouble," said Neal. "Now I can see the ocean through that narrow gut of the gorge way below. Bicycle cops, black boys in neat white helmets, travelin' the coast not twenty miles away. Whoever started this cow ranch—Spaniard, pirate or Englishman—was after a spot that wasn't worth the taxes, and didn't want a road in."

Crede watched the time. The shadows of an eight-hundred foot cliff were creeping across the cattle pens toward Rothwell Great House, and not a sign of life about. Crede waited an hour past noon.

"Neal, something's wrong. The Major entered that door and never came out. No one has gone up to the car on the ridge."

"Wait," whispered Neal, "some one has. Some one trailin' us. I saw him in the ferns. There, Dan, peerin' out to this slope."

"Roll to the ditch," whispered Dan. "I see him. Neal, follow that ditch downward. I want him to see you. I'll jump him when he passes me. Maroon man—one of those birds that never come down to the ports. Straight hair, high cheekbones. Old Carib stock, Joe—not African."

"And—" muttered Neal, "he's carryin' a spear. A short blackwood lance. Get him, Skipper—I'll be the decoy."

Neal stood up, shoved the wet bush aside and started down the hewn rock channel.

Crede watched up the bare slope. A lean man in the blue twill of a plantation hand had come to the open. His deepset eyes roved the thickets under which Neal moved. Thin brass rings glinted in his straight black hair. A man of years but alert as a cat. He poised the short heavy wooden spear as he stole down. Crede muttered. The Maroon's course was not taking him close enough for the rush Dan had planned. Then, down the water channel, Crede heard a startled cry, a soft crash, then nothing more. The hill man hastened his stealth. He was under the margin of bush where Neal had disappeared when the American started after him. Dan couldn't wait; that pig spear was coming up. Crede was two yards away when the polished black wood glinted, lanced into the brush. Then the thrower turned to face the white man. He jerked a cowhorn to his lips. The broken blast of the *abeng* wailed out as Crede lunged on him. His rush carried them both down through wet ferns and bush; then Dan felt his feet go from under him as he grasped the wiry body. He jerked the man around to break the fall he knew was coming. The breath

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went out from his prisoner's lungs with a crunching gasp as his back ribs struck the rock. Crede looked at his victim quietly, then got up.

Somewhere up the hill came a faint answer—another lookout sounded an *abeng*. Bad, thought Crede, and he looked around the brown gloom of the round pit into which he had crashed. Then he saw Joe Neal under a ledge staring up at the overhanging rim rock.

"Hurt, Joe?"

"No. I came down on this rotten moss. Say, Dan, who threw that spear at me? This guy you knocked out?"

"Yes. Hope he's not killed. Want him to talk. One of Rothwell's cattle-trackers likely. Joe, I shouldn't have sent you down that water channel. Should have known it would drop under the bush. You went into a pothole. Hills are honeycombed with 'em. My mistake——"

"It cheers me, Skipper," grinned Neal—"it's cheerin' to know you make mistakes. You're right so much of the time. Well, what now?"

Crede saw some vines hanging from the rim rock, past them the misty blue of the sky. Here, at the bottom of the round pit, through brown gloom, he saw the gray bedrock out of which the torrents of ages had eaten the ancient softer coral. Dan looked at his chart.

"Rothwell meant us to come down here but not on our heads. He marked a circle at the end of his dotted line. Let's look about."

Neal pointed at the unconscious man. "He's comin' to. Watch for some knife-throwin' trick, Dan."

"No. There's not a more decent lot in the Indies than these few descendants of the Indians that the Spanish destroyed. They want to be let alone. But I wonder?" He bent over the heaving brown breast.

"Chief Accompoy! Johnny—Big Johnny!"

The fallen man opened bewildered eyes. "White man! How you know?"

Crede laughed; he'd taken a guess and was right. "All right, Chief—now will you talk to me?"

Old Accompoy—a name that stretched straight back to Morgan's evil days—sat up slowly. "No," he said. "I do not talk."

"The *bucra*—Rothwell—sent me here. Now where is the young Englishman, Mr. Loree, who came last week and found Mr. Rothwell gone?"

"Bucra," said the Maroon steadily, "I do not know. I do not go into the Great House. I am old man. My people are few. I am sorry I threw the spear. We hunt wild pigs and we are not allowed to have guns."

"I know. But you have rights to the upper lands, you believe. And a black man, Zagor, said if *Bucra* Rothwell die, then the English family inherit the estate, and an old promise is broken. Listen, Accompoy, in Rothwell Great House there is a black spear and a musket hung on the wall, and long ago it meant a peace. You have never seen it, eh?"

The old man's face was granite. He would not answer.

CREDE went on confidently, pretending a knowledge he did not possess: "Big Johnny, there is a secret, and a price to pay which *Bucra* Rothwell could not pay. From the days when your ancestors obeyed the witch doctors. Old African stuff brought by the slaves—*obeah*. Who now has that power?"

The Maroon's eyes quivered, steadied: *"Obeah*—there is no such thing. I do not believe. I am free man."

"Don't expect you to believe it—admit it. The Crown officers make trouble where they find *obeah*. Old man, you are made a fool by others. Zagor, who was born here but went away to school and America. Big black boy, and his mother was a famous *obeah* woman in the hills! Now he comes back and makes the people afraid of him. You know it is nonsense."

The Indian face was granite again. "I do not know. I never saw such things.

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I stay in the hills. My son has worked for *Bucra* Rothwell and he does not know. Zagor say bad mens take our lands now."

"Sure. The law will deal with Zagor for tryin' to frighten you with witch doctor stuff. But listen, Accompoy, there's a water tunnel leading from this cave to the Great House. I have a gun, so I take you there. We will see what is there to frighten people so many years."

For the first time the Maroon showed feeling—fright. "No, *Bucra!* I do not

go there. I have heard—no—no—I will not go there!"

Crede laughed cheerfully. "All right. Then you promise me. You climb out of this hole. You go to your hut in the hills and work your yams—and whatever happens, you do not hereafter know anything of it. If not——"

The man turned hastily in relief. "*Bucra,* the law does not come?"

"Not if I can help it. There's always a company of British soliders at Kingston, however. Now listen; for years *Bucra* Rothwell has killed a goat in his caves as a sign of the old truce with your people. That has ended, but perhaps there is justice for you now. Old man, you can go."

The Maroon slipped to the lianas hanging from the rock rim and went up them with amazing swiftness. A shower of water came down as he parted the ferns. Joe Neal looked at Dan.

"Skipper, you let that bird go and he tried to rib me with this lance. Suppose he had?"

"I think you'd have gone where other men have gone in these caves. Black men, and white men. Since the days when Port Royal was the wickedest, richest city of the New World, and when the bloodiest pirate of them all was strong enough to have himself appointed governor of Jamaica —Harry Morgan. And the first Rothwell was one of his lieutenants. Here's the outlet tunnel on this side, Neal. The little Major is in this damned house, and we find him."

Neal looked into the dark of a square-hewn passage. "It would be a set-up for a pig-sticker to nail us. So I go first, as you're the more valuable man, horns, hide and hair."

Crede shoved ahead. "No hill man will be down here, Joe—unless he's forced to. That big smoke, Zagor—look out for him. But don't use your gun, Neal, for the love of Pete! That brings in the law, and a killin' is a hard thing to explain to British Law."

Twenty yards along the descending passage Neal turned on his flashlight. Crede jerked his arm. "Cut that, fella! Won't do. Makes us a fine target in case——"

Neal shut it off and felt of the chipped wall that chained slaves had hewn centuries ago. Down, down on rock slabs at last, which were on a level and ran straight into utter dark. Dan felt for the wall and stopped at a corner. Neal heard him sniff.

"A cross passage, Joe. In it the air is sweet and moving gently. Ahead it's dead, musty, rotten. That's where we go; it'll be to the cellars of the house. That good air means a natural cave, an opening beyond, somewhere."

"Let's have a look, just in case." Neal turned at the unseen corner and something came through the dark like a vast whisper. It grew to a murmur, a shuddering sigh, died away mournfully, and came again to fill the voiceless calm of the caverns and die again. Neal fell back, shot the light on.

"Good God, Dan! What was that?"

"Douse that light! Quick!"

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BUT Neal held it a moment, staring from his feet across a bottomless pit. Black depths. Across it a brown cavern with a sort of hewn room. From the cross passage, where Neal stood, a narrow shelf led about the abyss to this wider space across thirty feet of the gulf. Shaken as he was Neal felt the flicker of sweet air rising from it.

Crede took a step to him. "Hear me, Joe? Get that light off!"

Neal shut it off and groped back to the main corridor. His fingers touched Dan as he laughed mirthlessly.

"All right. The other path leads to—well, across that hole I saw—well, I don't know——"

"What did you see?" retorted Dan curtly.

"Hard to say. Just shapes—lumber covered with dust maybe. Then something lighter-colored—swinging. What the hell? But that noise! Man, there it comes again! What did I stir up?"

That sinister murmur was rising, and Crede did not answer. He felt Neal's fingers grip harder. The sound came higher but behind it great undertones of faint thunder. Then it sank to that ghastly whispering again to the ageless silence of the hollowed hills.

"Skipper," whispered Joe, "I give up—you'll have to explain."

"Well, think how it sounded to a young fella out from England—this nephew's excursion on a cruise ship to visit Uncle Rothwell."

"I don't give a ravin' damn about Loree, or a crazy planter either. I can guess why black boys won't enter this house, but come across, Skipper. It's nothin' to listen to in the dark."

Crede laughed softly. "The Major didn't want you along, Joe. But this pit down through the rotten coral is what the natives call a Sea Bawl hole. A number of 'em in the hills. You heard the ocean miles away. Flood tide is comin' into the shore caves and driving the air up. Certain winds bring a surf hammerin' high in the caves."

"Yeah? You might have prepared me. All right—but what did I see across that pit, Dan?"

Dan was silent. Then he retorted shortly. "I don't know. Now, see here, Joe. Our business is to pull our pal, the Major, out of any little mess he got into. Also the Britisher, Loree. But apart from this we've no right spyin' on Rothwell's secrets. You heard that this place is out of bounds for white men."

"Whatever—" grinned Joe— "that may mean. It's all right by me. The voices of dead Carib men and warrior slaves—*duppies* and all—make a good racket for somebody. Crede, that big black gangster from Chicago's South Side isn't believin' it. What does he want?"

"That's it—what? Come on, fella—we get under that house. Keep that damned light off."

Neal followed in the dark. Dan kept fingers to the wall and a foot feeling ahead. Slow work. When the distant Caribbean rose to its wailing the sound was muffled here. Then Crede halted. Neal knew he was examining some object. Then he pulled Neal aside.

"Steps," whispered Crede. "I felt five. Wood. Then a door—solid planks. The hinges broad as your head—slave-hammered iron. A catch——"

He suddenly jerked Neal aside into a rock niche by the unseen door frame. That door was opening outward. Hardly a sound, the soft slip of ancient wood. A brownish, flickering light fell outward.

A vast shadow wavered on the passage floor. Closer it came. Flattened against the rock wall Neal could glimpse a profile.

ZAGOR the Magnificent stood there, cocked hat, longtailed coat, and no pants. His red lapels and gilt epaulettes glinted dully. His big hand held the field man's machete. From his buttoned coattails up Frederick Zagor was the swank doorman of a Loop night club. From the tails down Zagor had gone back to the bush. A voodoo woman's dream of splen-

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dor—but dangerously hard as a Yank gunman.

"Johnny?" rumbled Zagor. "Johnny Accompoy, where you at?"

Neal laughed—almost. The spell was broken when Zagor spoke. The one-time head houseboy of Rothwell Great House was surly and anxious. He shouted once more, listened, and stepped back, pulling the bulletwood door shut. Neal waited till Dan Crede stirred.

"Skipper, we should have got that guy."

"Not with a cane knife in his mitts—unless we shot him. And no warrant for that yet. Wait, we'll have a try at that door. The room beyond seems an empty cellar with a resin flare for a light. Zagor won't remain there—he's too uneasy. He'll have business upstairs. Old Man Accompoy was his hill lookout and Johnny doesn't answer with his cow horn *abeng*. So the big brass hat is worried a bit. Come on, Joe."

Crede handled that cavern door as if it were delicately poised by a bank vault's tumblers. Tried, moved, halted, listened. When he did draw the latch up the door came heavily smooth. Dan went through swiftly but silent-footed. Past the dim, smoky flare by a passage leading from the bare rock room till he was in shadows again. There was a cross corridor here and Crede halted at the corner. Neal listened at his elbow. To the left, on the cross passage was a half-open door. A dim light came from it, then the sound of a chair scraping. And then, startlingly clear, Aylshire's voice.

"I say, Zagor, you can't do this. It's jolly well nonsense. You're not dealin' with a sick, nervous man such as Rothwell. You know your place in this house, and I insist—where is Mr. Loree?"

"You, white man, are not dealing with old Accompoy or any of the ignorant field boys either. Understand, white man?"

The Major tinkled a glass patiently. He'd evidently called for a drink and got it. "Quite. Rothwell's people would never have made trouble if you had not returned to Jamaica and set them to it. Bit of a lawyer, eh, Zagor? Proud of bein' a bad chap in the States, eh? You're not frightened by a few jolly old bones hangin' in chains, but haven't you some new line for the hill men? *Obeah* is dyin' out fast. Then you're not a real Maroon man, and really a priceless fraud."

Crede heard the Major's stick smart against his leather legging as he laughed. But Aylshire was getting nowhere against Zagor's heavy sureness. Zagor went on implacably.

"You will repent your words, white man. You have no business here. Mr. Rothwell was *bucra*—but he went away. There is no master now. The Maroon men have possession, they have the old rights, admitted by law older than Government House. So I do not listen to you."

The Major's voice sharpened. "Zagor, mind your tone! Where is Mr. Loree who stumbled into this affair innocently?"

"Where," Zagor's dull laugh arose, "are the two Americans from the schooner? Am I fool enough to believe you, sir?"

The chair scraped. The Briton was getting up. "Right, then. Sorry as we all shall be, this is a case for the inspector of constables——"

Zagor snarled, "You do not leave! Take him, Tommy Cobb——"

Crede sprang in the corridor, hand to his gun. "Here we go, Neal——"

They were two yards from the door when it swung shut. Struggling men had smashed against it. Dan heard the smart crack of Aylshire's stick.

Neal was hurling his football-trained shoulder to the door when Crede blocked him away. "Won't do! Gets us nowhere just yet. Keep on along the passage, Neal. There'll be another way up to the house. God knows where—there are thirty rooms, Aylshire said."

Neal followed past the door till they were in darkness again far down the main corridor. Crede breathed hard. "Hold up. These old houses were built to keep out war, fire and rebellion. What the planters

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did in their caves was no man's business in slave days. Rothwells of the seventeenth century didn't want the law in and don't now. Wait——"

Neal flattened to the wall, staring back. "Dan, they're coming from that room. Three figures by that torch one carries. See?"

THREE men turned from the cross-way to the main tunnel leading to that door which opened to the hill caverns. Ahead came a slight, lean dark man with the flare. Then the Major, and behind him Zagor's great shadow blotted the floor. Dan Crede started back.

"Got to make that door. Can't let 'em block us out from there——"

"Get the big man, Skipper. Cut him down——"

"No," said Crede. "Aylshire wouldn't stand for it. No shootin' till we must."

Zagor did not close the last door behind him. When Crede went down the five steps, the party ahead had turned into the hewn tunnel that led to the Sea Bawl hole. Neal heard the murmur rising. The boom of a distant, underground surf drowned any noise the two made in reaching the turn. By then the three ahead had gone along the narrow shelf that skirted the pit. Slowly, carefully. Dan saw them across the black depths in that squared cavern where the torch wavered upon the objects Neal had seen. Boxes, perhaps, huge bound bales—dead men's caskets—the light was too dim to distinguish them. Zagor halted. The Maroon man with the flare shifted uneasily. Major Aylshire stood with his hands on his hips inspecting the place curiously.

"Well, well—well! 'Pon my word! Deuced surprise—poor old Rothwell!" The Major walked about; he struck his head on something. There was a dry rattle, a shuffle of rusty chain, and a brownish round object fell to the cave floor. Aylshire took off his hat and brushed it. The torch man gasped. Zagor stared, but his lips tightened.

There had been a skeleton hanging in chains before the cached stuff and the Major had knocked it to a disjointed mess. "Well—my word!" he continued. "Young Loree must have been—ah—impressed. Good show, Zagor. What next have you?"

The young Maroon man was writhing with fright. Zagor was shaking with wrath. "White man!" he shouted at last. "You came to spy on Rothwell's place. I know about you!"

"Spy?" chuckled Aylshire. "So did you, Zagor. Long ago when you were a servant here. You dared to put a foot where no black man ever did before. Mind your tongue, Zagor. You're still Mr. Rothwell's butler as far as I am concerned."

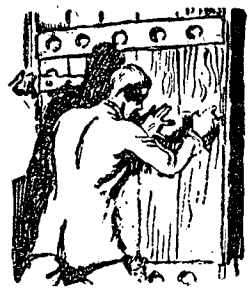
Zagor took a step toward the little man. Crede's hand tightened on his automatic across the black pit. "A last time, white man, I ask you where are the two Americans from the schooner?"

"Likely informing the precinct constables that Mr. Loree has mysteriously disappeared. Not so good, eh, Zagor?"

"You," Zagor laughed, but with a trace of fear, "will never be found to talk to them. Hear me?"

"That—" said the Major airily, "can be taken as a threat, eh?"

"No matter. I am master. I told the *bucra,* Rothwell, that some day I would



come back, and not be frightened as a boy is. I am here."

"And got these simple villagers in the rocks to rebel. Pity you weren't livin' in 1795, Zagor, the last real Maroon revolt. The chap whose head I just knocked from his chains would be you."

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ZAGOR could endure no more. The scared Maroon man was beginning to listen to the Major and not the distant mutter of the cave voices.

"Tommy Cobb," said Zagor thickly, "keep that flare up—hear me?"

"Cobb, eh?" put in the Major. "Heard of the Cobbs—a real Carib stock, been on Rothwell's upper lands for generations. Not like you, Zagor. Cobb, m'lad, buck up. *Duppies* and dead men are no end of a nuisance but harmless."

The Maroon was too frightened to answer, but Zagor pointed beyond the draped shapes to a tunnel beyond. "Walk ahead there, Tommy Cobb. You follow, white man. You wanted to see the hill caves. You will. The Englishman saw them last night!" He laughed harshly, and pointed. Aylshire shrugged and started after the man with the torch.

Crede touched Neal. "Follow when I do, Joe. I could stop that man with a slug, but the light's bad. Might clip the Major. And then we've got to know the rest. Keep your fingers to the wall along this ledge. Feel for your footing."

It was dark now. The three beyond the pit had made a turn with the flare. Dan groped on the ledge. He put out his foot to empty air on the left. They were in complete dark when Neal heard him stumble. Neal snapped on the flash. Dan was at the bottom of a six-foot cross crevice, not more than two feet wide. The bottom sloped sharply out.

"Keep the light low," muttered Crede. "This is a trap. If a man didn't know it he'd fall and slip outward to—nothing. All right, Joe!"

He crawled up slowly. Neal swung easily across the crack. With the light low they rounded the ledge to the hewn rock room. Then Neal whispered, "Too late, Dan. The big buck heard us. There he comes. Take no chance—put him away, Skipper!"

Crede circled about the room as Zagor charged from the passage. Dan shouted once to keep that damned light from his eyes. Neal held it at knee level as the two men clenched.

He yelled at Dan to watch his step. The fighting men were not a yard from the black pit. Crede had swung in close upon the heavier Zagor. He hadn't light enough to time a blow. Got one to the big man's jaw, and a left to the stomach that made him grunt.

Then the machete glinted, coming up. Crede got a grip on the knife wrist and shoved it higher, dancing about his man. Zagor shouted and swung. He glanced behind him. What he feared most was that yawning gulf where rays of Neal's light showed brown walls.

There was a ledge; there were discolored bones clinging upon it. Zagor thrust and tugged, and Crede uppercut him swiftly. Then they locked again. Neal saw past them to the tunnel. By the Maroon's torch he saw the Major gazing with complete surprise. The little man came nearer. He raised his voice sharply:

"Dan Crede, the beggar may know the footing, and you don't. I say, use your gun, eh?"

"Keep out of this!" shouted Crede. "You, too, Neal!"

He hung to the knife hand with his right and smashed punches to ribs, then higher. He caught Zagor on jaw and ear. Zagor gave way, still staring at the pit, and Crede shoved in. Close—closer—they seemed hanging on the rock rim. Crede could look down to nothing. And Zagor broke; this Yank seemed willing to go over the edge, and Zagor couldn't take it. He knew men had gone there before him. He howled and straightened up just as Crede clipped his chin. There was a gleam of brass buttons and gilt shoulder straps crossing Neal's flashlight beam. A moving shape, a shout, a faint crash somewhere below, a fainter splash of water. Neal stared at Aylshire.

Crede came to them panting slightly. "Caught him off balance. Sorry—I wanted that bird to talk. Major, did you find

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young Loree in those caverns beyond this one?"

THE Colony man lit a cigarette before answering. "Captain Crede, how did you ever manage to arrive in this ghastly hole?"

"Along the water catchment tunnel as Rothwell meant. But Loree, anything—bad?" Dan glanced at the Maroon torch man.

"Oh, Loree? Perfectly furious. Tied and gagged and blindfolded in a room beyond. Zagor took pains."

Crede got his breath better. "Well, where is he now?"

"As he was. I took the gag off but the blindfold—no. The idea is, Dan, that Loree was shoved through here and saw nothing. I intend to escort him out and up to the house, seeing nothing."

"Don't get you," grunted Dan. "All right though. One of those British ways of lookin' at things maybe."

"Oh, quite!" Aylshire laughed and turned to the Maroon. "Cobb, go around this Sea Bawl hole and to the passage and on to the Great House cellar. Then up and to the yard and to the hills. You will look neither to right nor left, and hereafter if any man asks you what you did or saw, you will say you saw—nothing? Right?"

"Yes, *bucra,*" whispered the Maroon humbly. He followed the Major's guiding arm past five skeletons swinging in chains from an unseen beam. Cobb shut his eyes and clutched the white man's arm. Across the pit, and beyond the shelf, Aylshire slapped his shoulder.

"Good boy! Furthermore, you will say to Johnny Accompoy that in the Great House the very old black spear and Sir Alan Rothwell's musket have been torn down from above the fireplace, and thrown into a place that has no bottom. Also that Zagor has gone away to a place, and that in a month the *bucra* Rothwell will return. Also that now no man is afraid, and now the Uprock lands will be given to Accompoy's village, and that no officer of the Crown will know of anything that happened. Right?"

"Yes, *bucra.*" The young Maroon went on to the turn into the main passage, and presently came the faint closing of a door. The Major chuckled. "And he will close his eyes when he crosses the big hall and once outside he will run."

Dan Crede was looking tiredly about at the dim shapes. "Major, you're committin' that man Rothwell to certain terms. How?"

Aylshire chuckled again. "James Rothwell told me to do as I thought best. I bound him to carry out the compact made by his piratin', raidin' ancestors with Accompoy's own people. Lands that were promised—and utterly worthless to anyone else."

"Well, why didn't he do it before?"

Aylshire glanced at Neal and shrugged. "You two remain here. I will fetch Loree

and escort him out. He'll be puzzled no end but the chap has no choice—really."

"Damned if I get it yet," grunted Dan Crede. "*Obeah*-hogwash. Between white men is it necessary to cover up a lot of bunk?"

"Oh, yes—easy way out." The Major took Neal's flash and went back through the far tunnel. Neal stood in the dark, listening to the ageless mutter of the sea under the Cockpit Hills. Once his hand touched a rusty chain and something fell with a dry rattle.

"Say, Dan," he muttered, "Aylshire intends to keep me out. Old family racket. These British birds are heavy on that."

"He promised Rothwell that much. Say,

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Neal, I wouldn't have any great curiosity about this junk scattered around. We're not treasure hunters. Anyhow, Rothwell was broke. Nothin' to it."

Neal saw the light returning. Aylshire was helping along a tall young fellow whose eyes wore a tight white bandage. Dan said:

"Stand back and be still, Joe. It's nobody's business."

"Like hell," grumbled Neal, but he stood back in silence.

THE Major was very encouraging as he took Loree carefully around the cavern, across the shelf and to the house passage.

"Y' see, young fella, I'm actin' as an old friend of your Uncle James. All this is a bit silly, but then you know a sick man's whims. I and my friends will join you upstairs at the sideboard for a drink in a moment. Your eyes freed of course. The thing is that you encountered a lunatic. That big black bounder—Zagor—the one-time butler here. He was a bit rough, eh?"

Loree's bewildered voice was trembling with anger. "The rotter! Pointed a pistol at me, trussed me all up and led me into the cellars!"

"That—" the Major's voice was velvet—"was all you saw?"

"See? I saw nothing—absolutely. The fellow told me nothing!"

"Ah!" Aylshire was still talking when the two went around the turn to the house corridor. "Dear fellow, you came to Jamaica on a cruise ship? Stayed over a fortnight to look up the colonial end of your family, eh? And your return ticket from Port Antonio must be used next Thursday—what? Jolly arrangement—I will see that you get down from the mountains and aboard safe enough."

"But—" shouted the Englishman, "this outrage—abominable!"

Dan Crede and Neal stood in silence again. "If I was that guy," said Joe, "I'd turn and swing one on the Major, bandage or not."

"Aylshire will show him reasons not to. Well, I can stand that drink the Major promised—up in the Great House. There he comes back. Busy as a one-armed witch-doctor talking *Obeah* sign language, tonight."

"Dan, he's got to tell us things. I'm fed up on standin' on one foot in the dark in somebody's private grave-yard. I put my left leg down a minute ago and felt some teeth rattle. Might have bit me——"

The Major was coming around the ledge of the Sea Bawl hole with the flashlight. Nobody said a word. He sat down on what seemed to be a bale roped, rotten and blackened with age.

"Bit fagged," he announced. "Only stayed with Loree for one drink straight. Now chaps, I need your help a bit longer. The idea bein' to get Loree well squiffed and hustle him down to your schooner, Neal. Then aboard and about to Port Antonio. Then to his cruise ship, homeward-bound. Loree will consider his week-end in Jamaica with the Colonial branch of his family sufficient. Puzzlin' but sufficient."

"Come on," said Dan Crede. "I'll get a drink into him. I need one."

"Don't say," argued Neal, "I'm bein' escorted out of this dungeon without an explanation either. You can't get away with it."

The Major got up. "I suppose you mean what may be in these cases and bales of goods. Not much of value any longer, I fear. Rip off that rotten ship's canvas, Neal, and satisfy yourself. About all the Rothwells left are a few museum pieces. Y' see, for some generations they smuggled abroad and sold whatever the market would stand. They'd live like lords through one London season and come home broke."

"The first mob of Rothwells were with Harry Morgan, you said," put in Crede, "and they got out of Port Royal in 1692 with all the pirates' plunder they could after the quake destroyed it. Yes, but that

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doesn't account for James Rothwell bein' backed to the wall."

"No," chuckled the Major, "but this does." He pulled away the black wrappings from a bale. It seemed to be discolored tapestry, faded, rotten silk, and then an age-stiffened oil portrait. There was some tarnished silver in another that Neal pried open. Plates and battered cups. Then a whole box of pewter, and two of seamen's cutlasses. Neal found the others held rusted flintlock muskets, and he wiped his hands and came back. "Stuff for a museum is right," he said. "I guess the Rothwell family got the rest. Jewels, gold, maybe."

"Yes, and the bad thing was where it came from. Y' see, Neal, when Morgan reformed and became governor, the Rothwells had got the lootin' habit. Made terms with the Maroon rebels to save their own place when every other planter along the lowlands was raided. By the time of the last real war in 1795, the Rothwells had gone further into outlawry; they took their share of plunder and cached it here. Then they had to keep people away, of course, and they used the *Obeah* doctors against the blacks. And the whites—well, it wouldn't have done to invite a guest here and have the man discover that he was dinin' on silver plate that had been swiped from his great-grandfather's house, eh? Awkward—and so the Rothwells got the name of bein' queer—playin' along with witch doctors and all that. Neat, y' see—when their own slaves revolted they hanged them down here and spread the good word about ghosts and all."

"Worked all right, till this Zagor went to America and picked up some points on ghosts. I never did believe education was any good for some people." Dan Crede laughed tiredly.

"Right. Zagor's mother was a big *Obeah* woman and Rothwell dealt with her to keep his family's thievin' history a secret. But Zagor tried blackmail, thinkin' there was still some treasure in the caves. There was not, and Zagor got rough. Rothwell was no man to handle that when the Maroons went to grumbling under Zagor's influence. But nobody could afford to fetch in the law. Poor old James wanted to cover the family's dirt, and the Maroons knew what the Government would say about *Obeah*. Five years on the rockpile nowadays."

"Come on," put in Neal, "I need that drink upstairs. Bone dust in my throat and a dead man's tooth tangled in my boot lace." He took one last look about the cave with his flashlight. "The mystery of Rothwell Great House can keep on bein' just that for all of me."

"I'll cable James tomorrow," chuckled the Major, "that the black spear's down from the wall. He'll know what we mean."

"Let's go," said Captain Crede. "We've business somewhere else."

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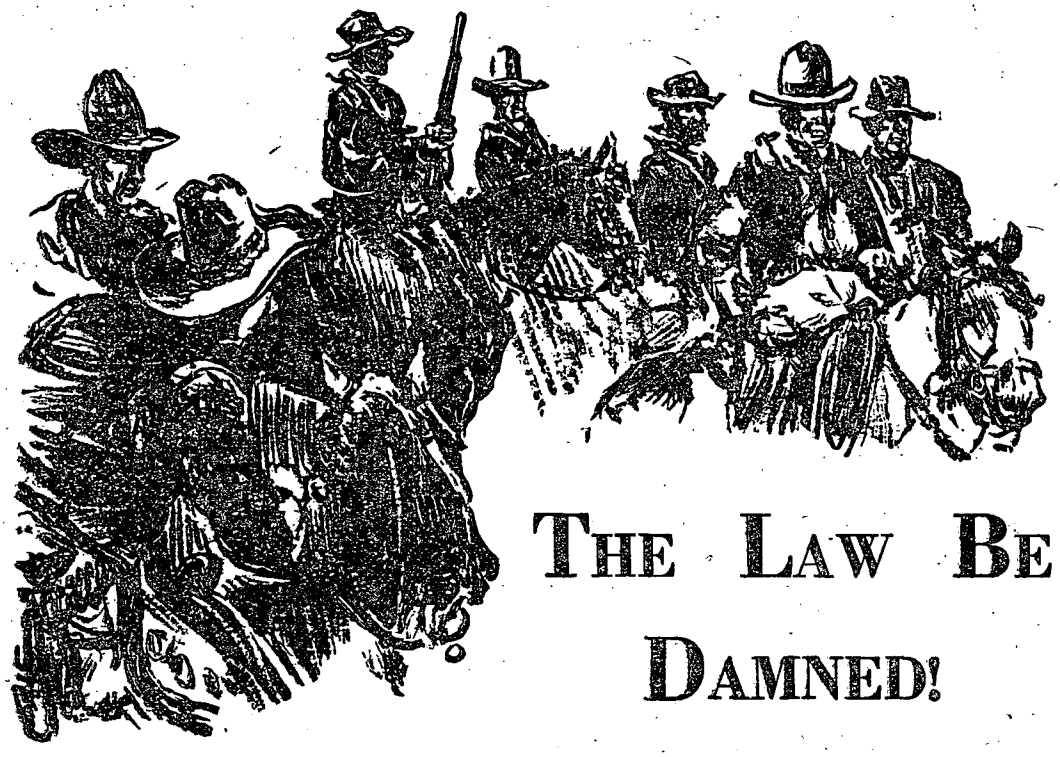
Seco McSpadden Only Thought That Was the Way He Thought About It



THE LAW BE DAMNED!

By S. OMAR BARKER

Author of "Catalogue Cowboy and Co.," "Forty Ways," etc.

"BUT you *got* to go, Seco!" Sheriff Giltner's bony knuckles pounded the bed feebly. "You're a sworn officer of the law!"

"You mean I *was* an officer, Gilt. Not now I ain't." Seco McSpadden laid his deputy's star gently but firmly against the thin fingers of his sick chief's clenched fist—fingers that refused to open to receive it. "There ain't no law nor bustin' of it worth puttin' a man on the gun-trail after his friend. Not a friend like ol' Clay Dunnegin, anyhow."

"Stuff!" snorted Sheriff Giltner from his pillow.

"Stuff or not," said the younger man, in the dry voice that had given him the nickname of "Seco," "consider me resigned!"

The sheriff's fingers, mere skin over bone from weeks of bed-ridden fever, picked up the star. There was respect in his touch of it, respect in the deep-socketed eyes with which he gazed upon it—the respect of a veteran of law enforcement for the plain metal symbol of his hard but honest calling.

"Clay Dunnegin's charged with murder," he said. "The law don't know no friends!"

"I do," said Seco McSpadden. "An' a killin' ain't always murder. But even if it was, I wouldn't——"

"Wup, here! Don't say it, son. Here's your star. You've wore it with honor in the past. Take it—an' go bring in Clay Dunnegin. Alive if he'll come—but bring him!"

The cowboy's lean brown face, wrinkled beyond his years by the summer sun and the winter winds of far flung rangeland

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trails, showed tightening muscles along the jaw. His greenish gray eyes stared bleakly out of the sickroom to a breasty rise of timbered hills, blue-hazed to westward under a chilled steel rim of winter sky. Cold, wind-fanged and bitter, would ride those ridges tonight. He could guess where, among them, a small, hidden campfire would be sending up its limited blaze as a round-faced, grizzly little man hovered over it, cooking his lone, scanty supper, his gun ready to his hand, his frost reddened ears uncovered to the cold, the better to listen for the threat of man-sounds in the night. Seco McSpadden could vision him limping to a tree-shadowed ridge-top, squatting sleepless against a tree trunk, watching, waiting, on guard against men of the law who, sooner or later, would come for him.

There had been a time when Clay Dunnegin did not limp. That was before he had frozen off four of his toes in a bitter, blizzardy night a dozen years ago, hunting for—and finding—a lost deer hunter. The deer hunter was a mere kid, new from the plains country, who had been warned not to try to ride down into the head of Trap Canyon in a snowstorm, but who had done it nevertheless. Clay Dunnegin had found him, with a broken leg, where his horse had fallen in the slide-rock, and carried him out. The kid's leg had healed and left him no limp, for today Seco McSpadden could walk as straight or ride as far as the next one. But four of old Clay Dunnegin's toes were gone. And tonight he was a wanted man.

SECO McSPADDEN had handled the job of chief deputy during the long weeks of Sheriff Giltner's illness and handled it well. But now he stood gazing at the darkening hills and answered the sheriff's orders flatly.

"No," he said. "If it comes to that, the law be damned!"

Sheriff Giltner swung his bony, nightshirted arm aloft. For a sick man his throw was hard. The chief deputy's badge whizzed across the room, crashed through a frosty window-pane and clattered to the gravelly ground outside. The sheriff snapped out a short half dozen words, his voice at once sharp and cold.

"Right," he said. "Send me in Ed Deering!"

"Deering? Damn it, Gilt, you wouldn't deputize him to——"

"Seco," broke in the sheriff in a flat, hard tone, "you've said your say. Get out!"

Stiff-necked, his lean jaw stubbornly set, the cowboy went. The sheriff's wife came to him at the door. Evidently she had heard the talk.

"I don't blame you, Seco," she said. "But don't you blame him too hard, neither. The law—it's got to be a part of him, somehow. Like breathin', or the beatin' of his heart."

The cowboy's jaw loosened into a little smile.

"Sure," he said kindly. "I savvy. An' he's dead right, of course, but—well, I'm a weak-sister, I reckon. I just can't do it, that's all. But I don't blame ol' Gilt for tryin' to make me. I sure hate it, rilin' him up thisaway when he's sick abed, Mrs. Giltner."

He stepped out the door.

"Wup, here! What's goin' on?"

From down in the village came sounds of commotion. Voices of men, loud and excited, whipped harshly through the chill evening air. At a long stride Seco McSpadden hurried down the hill and along Las Vegitas' slanting Main Street toward the yellow light of an entrance lamp swinging in front of Pete Du Chene's saloon, where he could see men milling about excitedly. His booted heels thumped soundingly on the frozen ground, and as he went, the hardness of his jaw returned. Unconsciously, yet deftly, he eased the .45 up a little in the lowswung holster at his right thigh. It was an old habit with him to do this, readying the gun for a rapid draw.

The loud talk stopped, like a water tap

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shut off, as he came into the smoky circle of light. Seco paused, looking from one to another, saying nothing. A sort of sullen defiance showed on some of the men's faces, others merely met his gaze blankly, without expression.

A lank, dish-faced hombre in a black hat, swaggeringly chin-strapped, swung around and shoved one of the swinging doors half open with the snout of his gun.

"Here he is, Ed," he called into the saloon.

Seco McSpadden stood silent where he was, but instinctively, unnoticed by the others, his feet moved a little wider apart, making a straight, rigid V of his long legs —an excellent stance for steadiness.

The bat-wing doors banged open. A big man, broad faced and blond, bulged out between them. Arrogance stuck out all over him, from the set of his black chin-strapped hat to the heavy thump of his rowelled boots.

"Evenin', *Sheriff!*" he boomed, his bellowing voice harsh with sarcasm. "Here's men for your posse—an' our powder's dry! We're goin' to git that skunk that killed Butch Graham—an' git him tonight. You ready?"

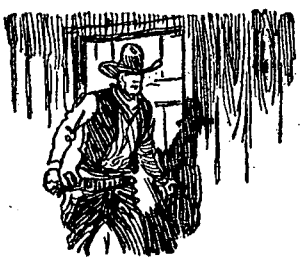
Seco had pulled out the makin's and was calmly fingering on a brown smoke.

"Yeah," he said slowly, "I'm ready—to down the first man that makes a false move here! I savvy this play, Deering—but you ain't goin' to lynch Clay Dunnegin—not tonight you ain't. Git your hands up—all of you."

Two or three hands went up, but with an oath that was half snarl, half sneer, Ed Deering went for his gun. His draw was fast, but Seco McSpadden's apparent busyness with cigarette rolling had fooled him. Brown paper and sifty tobacco spilled free of his fingers. In a flash of movement that was not unlike the smooth, sure reach of a steam-pushed driver on a locomotive, Seco's right hand swung down and up—down empty, up with a steady fistful of gun, pointing a deadly barrel.

WHOSE shot would have spelled death that night the men who circled fearsomely under that dingy flare of yellow lantern light, will never know. For without warning the batwing saloon door behind Ed Deering banged suddenly open. It smacked the point of his elbow with a violent *wham* that joggled his aim. His two quick bullets flew wild. And Seco McSpadden did not shoot. In the time of a heart-beat he stopped the tightening pressure of his trigger finger lest the bullet meant for Deering should chance to kill as well the man who had banged out through the door and stood, now, in blank-faced puzzlement tugging at Deering's arm.

Without turning, Ed Deering kicked backward at this man's shins, trying to jerk



free from the claw-like clutch of crooked fingers that would not let his gun arm up again to fire.

"Jeeminy! Jeeminy, Ed!" jabbered the newcomer. "Jeeminy-gosh!"

With an oath Ed Deering whirled upon him. It was like a wolf whirling upon a fear-paralyzed rabbit. "Jeeminy" Jones, scrawny, pint-size, half-wit roustabout and alley-rat of Las Vegitas, let out a shrill squeal of fright and pain as Deering's big fist struck him in the face.

"Jeeminy!" he yowled. "Jeeminy-gosh! He's killin' me—he's——"

Seco's sixgun chugged down into its holster. His long legs snapped forward in two long strides. His fingers clamped onto the grimy collar of Ed Deering's shirt, yanking him off of the bellowing runt, heaving him around against the wall.

"I wouldn't beat the boy, Deering," he said dryly. "His poppin' out there in the

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line of fire is all that saved your lousy life. My gun's holstered—if you want to try smackin' somebody nearer your size!"

Ed Deering's answer was a wordless snarl—and a writhing effort to swing his gun barrel around into the other man's middle. It was then that Seco McSpadden smacked him, hardfisted, mule-legged for power, square in the face. Blood spurted from Deering's squarish nostrils. He backed against the wall, tottering on his heels. Fast and sure as an eagle claw, Seco's fingers clamped the wrist of his gun hand, twisted, and the .45 thumped to the walk boards.

"Jeeminy, Seco! Jeeminy gosh!" shrilled the little half-wit, backing away. "Behind yuh! Look out!"

The warning was too late. Half a dozen men landed like clawing wildcats on Seco McSpadden's back. Seco shook his big lean frame like a harried bear shaking off a dogpack. Two men lost their holds and sprawled a man's length away. But three or four held, and Ed Deering lunged in, snarling.

Seco McSpadden went down fighting. The windy sound of grunted curses from hardstruck men answered the punch of his fists. Jeeminy Jones danced around them, yelling shrilly, kicking at whatever arms, legs, heads, backs or bellies showed nearest him. Then the back-kick of a heavy boot caught him full force at the belt and downed him, doubled with pain, on the sidewalk.

Seco McSpadden fought like a wounded lion, but they were too many for him. He lay on his back, finally, bloody faced, silent, with the weight of four men to hold him down.

"Hold 'im," panted the dish-faced hombre called Sunk-Face Wurtz, "till I git a rope!"

"That's right—le's hang the skunk!"

HEAVY footsteps clumped on the walk. A pudgy, thick-barrelled, dudish hombre with pink jowls and a waxed brown mustache bulged into the light.

"Here, here!" he boomed. "What's this? What's this, boys?"

Gordo Simms, Town Marshal of Las Vegitas, looked formidable—if you didn't know him. He was heavily hardwared—but that was all. His pudgy right hand flourished a half smoked cigar, plainly denying any intention of said pudgy hand to seize and operate either of his heavy guns at this point in the proceedings.

"Disturbing the peace like this—assaulting an officer—I won't have it, I say!" he blustered.

Nobody seemed to pay any attention to him, but Seco McSpadden grinned faintly through bruised and bleeding lips.

"Don't let the officer angle fret you, Gordo," he said dryly. "My star's done throwed away. I reckon lynchin' a private citizen or two don't come under your jurisdiction, does it?"

Ed Deering's big hand smacked open-palmed, hard across Seco's mouth.

"Shut up!" he grunted. Then to the fat-middled marshal, "It bumps a man your build right smart to git run over, Gordo. Hear that dog howlin'? Got his tail froze in a water trough, I expect. You better git down there an' see about it, hadn't yuh?"

There *was* a dog howling—Clay Dunnegin's dog, it happened, tied up in the yard at Mandy Jason's boarding house where his fugitive master had left him—and Town Marshal Simms, with chuffy warnings to "the boys" to behave themselves, waddled on down the street to see about it. It was part of Gordo Simms' official code that all violence, involving danger to life and limb in Las Vegitas was the affair of the sheriff's office, not his. His job was merely to keep the peace—the peace, that is, for Marshal Simms, so that he could draw his pay and petty graft without having to spend any of it on lead and gunpowder. Now, if he heard the harsh, rude laughter of Ed Deering and his gang as he waddled away, it seemed wise to him to ignore it.

As Deputy Sheriff, Seco had never been much concerned about this pompous, pup-

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pet town marshal. He had figured, and rightly, that Sheriff Giltner and his chief deputy were law enough for Las Vegitas as well as most of the surrounding county. He had looked upon Gordo Simms' star with a sort of good humored contempt. Gordo, at least, had never got seriously in the real law's way when there were arrests to be made.

Now, lying prisoner on the chill boards in front of Pete Du Chene's, Seco reflected a little bitterly upon the Law that would permit a spineless dumpling like Gordo Simms to wear a star and yet call upon Seco McSpadden to go out on the trail of the friend who had once saved his life.

Yet he had to admit there was a difference in the sources of authority between these two officers who held their trust so differently. Back of Town Marshal Simms were Pete Du Chene, Ed Deering and their little ring of small town gambler-politicians. Back of Sheriff Giltner were the votes of the honest citizens of Vegita County—a majority of them, at least—the ranchmen, homesteaders, lumbermen, miners, freighters; the votes, in short of the people who worked rather than schemed for their living. And the old sheriff held his trust a sacred one—hard sometimes, perhaps, but sacred: the Law, without fear and without favor.

FOR a moment Seco McSpadden wondered if it had been either wise or manly in him to quit its service, now of all times. But Clay Dunnegin was his friend, and Clay Dunnegin, once arrested, would be tried, and Seco feared, almost surely convicted—by a Las Vegitas jury—of murder. Seco had simply refused to be a party to bringing his friend either to prison or a rope-end. It didn't matter that Butch Graham, the dead man, had been one of the jackals of Pete Du Chene's and Ed Deering's gang. Seco figured he would have felt the same no matter who he had been.

But now, shorn of his badge, they were going to string him up, too. What help would he be to his hunted friend, dangling at the end of a rope?

The man who came running with the rope stumbled over the down figure of Jeeminy Jones. He cursed, drew back a boot and kicked him. Kicked him so hard that Jones rolled clear across the sidewalk to bump groggily into McSpadden, and lay there against him, groaning feebly.

"Up!" snapped Ed Deering.

Four men, two of them twisting his arms behind him, yanked Seco to his feet.

"Down the alley, boys, an' outa town south—to the cottonwoods. Git him on a horse, first! Damn it, you want his boot-tracks all over hell?" Deering gave orders swiftly. "Besides, walkin' him's too slow. Up, you! Stick your foot into that stirrup, McSpadden, like I tell you, or by God, I'll——"

Grimly Seco kicked out with his freed foot; but uselessly, for they had him anchored. The sting of Deering's leather quirt lashed across his face. He lifted his foot to the stirrup and stepped up to the saddle despite his bound hands. It was no use to resist now. The beating he had given Ed Deering before they ganged on him had roused Deering to an insane fury. Seco realized it ruefully. Deering, in the cold cunning of his right senses would never risk packing a man off thus openly, even in the dark, to be hanged.

Seco thought about letting out a yell for help, for they had not gagged him. But he didn't do it. It was true he had friends—a good many of them—among the peaceable, law-abiding citizens of Las Vegitas, but at this darkening hour of a sharp cold night, few men were out. Yet if he yelled some of them might hear him and come running to find out what was the matter. Come running in the darkness, maybe with guns in their unaccustomed hands. In his present mood Ed Deering would fight. Somebody would surely be killed. Maybe it would be the friendly tenderfoot who chored for Mandy Jason; maybe Luke the barber, who had a wife and kids.

Grimly Seco McSpadden kept his mouth

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shut. He had stepped into this trouble himself. He'd take it as it came, without help.

Somewhere off in the dark Clay Dunnegin's dog howled again.

Suddenly swift, swishy footsteps quartered into the alley ahead of them on a cut off trail from up on the hill. Seco heard Deering click back the hammer of his gun, growling at the rest to draw rein.

Matchlight flared all at once not a dozen feet before the noses of their horses. In its glow stood the short, bundled figure of a woman, a red shawl wrapped close about her head. Seco as well as the rest of them, stared in surprise. It was the sick sheriff's wife.

"Mr. Deering? Is Ed Deering there?" She peered out past the match flicker toward the little group, reined up now, in the darkness.

Ed Deering cleared his throat, made his voice sound smooth. Smooth and polite.

"Yessum," he said. "You wantin' to see me, ma'am?"

"Gilt—Sheriff Giltner does. He wants to talk to you about—about that killing. He's worried because——"

"Sure, ma'am," said Deering. "Tell him I'll be up—a little later. You better git on back, ma'am—it's a mighty cold night, an'——"

"I—I heard shooting," said the woman, a little fearfully, "I—I know you aren't a friend of his, Mr. Deering, but—but have you seen Seco McSpadden? He started down toward the saloon—then I heard shooting and I was afraid maybe——"

"Who? McSpadden?" In the darkness Ed Deering's gun barrel prodded sharper than ever into the small of Seco's back, grimly warning him to silence. "Why, no, we ain't none of us seen him tonight, ma'am. That shootin'—that was just some of the boys actin' up a little gay. No trouble, ma'am. No ma'am, none whatever!"

"Well, I'm mighty glad o' that," Mrs. Giltner spoke with a sigh of relief, faintly tinged with doubt. "Because I'm havin' time enough as it is keepin' Gilt in bed where he belongs. If he thought Seco was in trouble—even if he ain't wearin' the star no more—a team o' horses couldn't hold him. He'd be right out in all this cold in spite of me. But I won't keep you here in the cold talking, Mr. Deering. Gilt was jest determined I'd find you an' tell you to come in an' see him—it's something about Dunnegin."

She turned back up the hill, and in the darkness the grim cavalcade moved on.

It was not wholly the gun barrel in his ribs that had kept Seco McSpadden silent. He could not surmise what course Deering might take if he made his presence as a prisoner known. Enraged as the man now was, even the sheriff's wife might not be safe if she saw or heard too much.

Seco realized also how promptly Sheriff Giltner might climb out of his sick bed and come rampsing out into the cold that would likely mean relapse and death to him, if he even suspected that Seco McSpadden was in serious trouble. So Seco had kept silent. In the name of friendship he had refused duty and handed the sick sheriff his star. It would be cowardly now to call on him for help.

TWO men led the horse that Seco rode, the lead ropes both tied fast. Deering and another rode close at his side, their guns in hand, and another followed close behind. Escape was out of the question.

"Bluffed you, eh?" Deering chuckled hoarsely.

"Yeah," said McSpadden. "Like hell!"

At the cottonwoods they had a fight on their hands again before they could get a rope knotted around Seco's neck, but they handled him. He sat in the saddle in the darkness, hands bound behind his back while Sunk-Face Wurtz climbed the tree to make the other end of the rope fast to a branching limb. Cottonwoods are handy trees for hanging. Two men held him. A third held the horse, ready to slap him loose and leave the silent man in the saddle dangling in the dark. Seco felt the rope

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jerk at his neck as Sunk-Face caught up slack for the tie.

"Ready," he called down. "She's anchored. Kick 'im out!"

It seemed strange to Seco that even now he noticed the weather. Starlight was slowly blackening out in the east. It would snow before morning—covering tracks.

Back at the village dogs barked and howled, stirred to uneasiness by the howling lament of Dunnegin's Old Spot for his master.

The man at the horse's head started to step away. With a sudden stride Ed

Deering took his place, gripping the bridle reins short.

"Cold?" Deering spoke tauntingly.

"Don't let it fret you," Seco drawled in his usual dry, flat tone. "Jump him out, an' I'll thaw out in hell! What's stoppin' you, Deering?"

Something was, quite evidently. Seco sensed it. Deering cleared his throat.

"Look here, McSpadden," he growled. "You're jest a half inch from hell. You want to talk turkey? Where, exactly, is Clay Dunnegin hidin' out—tonight?"

Seco smiled grimly to himself. So that was it—they'd been all set to strike out after Clay Dunnegin, but they didn't know where to look—and they figured, rightly, that he did.

"Well, I know one place he ain't," he said.

"Where?" Deering took the bait.

"On the end of a rope," said Seco dryly.

"Tough hombre, ain't you? Listen here, young feller, Dunnegin's wanted for murder. It was your job to go bring him in. You show yellow an' turn it down cold. Now the sheriff calls for me. It ain't because he loves me. Then why, d'you reckon? Because he knows I got the guts to go out an' arrest Dunnegin, that's why!"

"Arrest him?" Seco broke in, his voice acid with sarcasm. "Murder him, you mean! Well, what you waitin' on? You aimin' to freeze me to death—or hang me?"

"Neither—maybe—if you'll jest be sensible. I'm goin' to give you your choice, McSpadden. Lead me to Dunnegin's hideout, at least tell me exactly where to find him, an' we cut you free; otherwise——"

"Thanks," McSpadden broke in again. "The rope's tied, ain't it? Jump out the horse!"

With an oath Ed Deering swung his arm, slashing the knotted flail-strings of his quirt across Seco's unprotected face.

"Talk, damn you!" he snarled. "Like that? Talk then—talk!"

Seco licked bruised lips and spat blood from them.

"All right," he said thickly. "I'll talk. You can believe it or go to hell. Clay Dunnegin ain't hid out in the hills. He's locked up in the county jail. He sneaked in an' give himself up early this evenin'. If you whelps hadn't ganged me, I'd aimed to turn him out an' see that he got plumb away—tonight. That's how come I turned in my star."

"Goose oil!" scoffed Deering. "Where the hell's your keys to the jail to turn him out with? You ain't got 'em on you, sure as hell!"

The man was right. They had already rifled Seco's pockets and found no keys in them.

"Keys be damned," said Seco. "Shorty Tucker's the jailer. He'll do what I say, star or no star, if it means turnin' out ever' damn prisoner he's got. Think that over, Deering."

"You lie like a dog!" Deering sneered.

"Like two dogs, maybe. An' here's some more I don't give a damn whether you believe or not. Last thing I said to Sheriff

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Giltner this evenin', 'If I turn up missin',' I told him, 'you can lay it on Ed Deering. He's out to get me because I'm a friend of Clay Dunnegin's.' Well, Giltner's abed right now, but he'll be up again one of these days, wearin' his guns. Maybe you like to think that over, too."

"You figger I'll fall for a yarn like that an'——"

"I'd just as soon lie to a skunk like you as not, Deering. But I ain't in the figgerin' business right now. I'm gettin' myself hung. You figger to suit yourself, but figger something pronto before my tail freezes to the saddle!"

Deering grunted doubtfully and then stood silent. But he did not turn the horse loose from under McSpadden. One of the men growled impatiently.

"Hell, Ed! This a prayer meetin' or a hangin'? What you waitin' on?"

SECO said no more. But he had judged his man well. It was Clay Dunnegin that Deering wanted to get, presumably to avenge the death of Butch Graham, whatever his real reasons. By making no bones about the possibility of his lying, Seco had made the man believe him—enough at least, for the moment.

Finally Deering spoke.

"Git up an' untie that rope again, Sunk-Face! Mister McSpadden's goin' back to town with us—to tell Shorty Tucker to hand over Dunnegin! Or would you rather hang, McSpadden?"

"It's a cold night," said Seco. "Man might freeze to death, swingin' in the wind thataway. Take me to the jail. I'll tell Shorty to turn ol' Dunnegin out, if that's what you want!"

"Hell help you, McSpadden," said Deering savagely, "if you're foolin' me! Come on, you lunks. Let's go—an' quiet, damn your hides!"

They rode quietly, by dark alleys, through the silent town, guarding their prisoner closely. Once through the faint sift of grainy snow that had begun to fall, Seco heard Clay Dunnegin's dog again. Only this time he was not howling. He was yelping excitedly. Neither Deering or his men gave the sound any heed.

They left Sunk-Face with the horses behind an old adobe wall, not far from the jail. They marched Seco to the jail door, with sixgun barrels for prods. At the door they untied his hands, but Deering tied a rope end fast to one of his feet. He took the other end with him into the black shadows beside the door, where he and his men crouched out of sight, covering Seco with their ready guns.

Obediently Seco knuckle-thumped the door.

"Whoozit?" called a voice.

"Shorty? It's me—Seco. Open up a minute."

A key grated in the lock. The heavy door swung open, silhouetting Shorty Tucker against the dingy lamplight inside. Shorty jangled his keys on a big wire ring looped over a stubby finger, careless, unsuspicious.

"Hello, Seco! Come in! What the——"

"Shorty," Seco broke in tersely, "bring Clay Dunnegin out here an' turn him a-loose!"

"Dunnegin? Hell, man, you crazy? Dunnegin ain't here. He's hidin' out up on the——"

Panther-swift Seco leaped for the open jail door.

"Jump, Shorty, before——"

At the jerk of Deering's hand on the rope tied to his right foot, Seco fell headlong, sprawling, in the doorway. But the guns trained on him did not fire. Ed Deering had ordered them not to. He had no desire to raise a racket here that would rouse the town, if he could help it.

Furthermore, he had believed Seco's yarn about Dunnegin being here in the jail.

In a swift, leaping scramble, Deering and four men lunged into the doorway upon Seco and the surprised jailer. A smash in the face stopped Shorty's reach for his gun. He went down with the two men a-straddle of him. One grabbed his gun, the other his keys. Deering and the rest yanked Seco

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inside and banged the door shut. Battered though he was, Seco tried to put up a fight. Savagely Deering thugged the side of his head with a gun butt. Seco McSpadden stretched out, groaned and lay still.

Deering stood over him a second, then whirled upon Shorty Tucker as his assailants yanked him to his feet.

"Quick!" he snapped. "Where's Dunnegin? Which cell?"

Shorty Tucker looked dazed. Blood trickled from his gooseberry nose.

"Why, damn it," he began. "I tell you Dunnegin ain't——"

His denial broke off abruptly. He shrugged as if in sudden surrender, but his biggish eyes were wary.

"All right, boys," he said. "You win! Gimme my keys, an' I'll go bring him out!"

The man with the keys started to hand them over. Ed Deering's blood smeared fist reached out and grabbed them.

"I'll handle the keys, Mister Jailer," he said. "You lead out to Dunnegin's cell, an'

no monkey business, or I'll stretch you out there with McSpadden!"

This time Shorty Tucker grinned defiantly.

"Save yourself the trouble," he said. "Clay Dunnegin ain't in here!"

Cursing, Ed Deering went to see. There were only six cells. In two of them were Mexicans with roughly bandaged knife wounds. The other four were empty. Clay Dunnegin was no prisoner here.

Deering came back to the little office, literally frothing at the mouth. He drew back a boot and kicked the unconscious man on the floor viciously.

"I knowed you ort to of hung him—while you had him out there," observed one of the hard looking hombres holding Shorty Tucker. "He admitted he prob'ly was lyin' to you, didn't he?"

"Come on, Ed," said another, harshly humorous. "Let's git outa here—this here's a jail!"

"Never mind the hurrawin', Jake!" Ed Deering jangled the jailer's keys in one hand and swabbed sweat from his forehead with the other. He wore the uncertain look of a dog that has been chasing his own tail—and caught it. "Let's git——"

A rapid tapping on the door, as of a man both nervous and in a hurry, stopped him.

"Cover that door!" Deering rasped in a whisper. "Maybe it's Sunk-Face, but if it ain't——" he hammer-cocked his own gun significantly. Then warily he eased the door open a little, showing himself only as much as he must to cover the knocker with his gun.

The fat jowls of Gordo Simms loomed in the scant light.

"Ed?" The paunchy town marshal's anxious whisper boomed hollowly. Before that gleam of gun barrel he started to back away uncertainly.

"You!" Deering showed himself. He spoke in a tone of irritated contempt. "What the hell you want here, Gordo? Didn't I tell you——"

"The dog!" sputtered Gordo Simms, gulping as if to swallow the fright that quivered his jowls. "He came after it. He——"

"Git in here!"

Deering reached out and jerked the man inside. The puppet marshal's middle heaved with his panting.

"Now, what the hell *you* blubberin' about?"

Gordo Simms took time to shake himself like a rooster smoothing out ruffled plumage.

"That howling dog," he said finally. "Disturbing the peace. I kept goin' back to try and shut him up. Listen, Ed—that

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was Dunnegin's dog! Last time I went back, just a few minutes ago, he came and got him. I'd have arrested him, then and there, but——"

"To hell with your alibis!" Deering broke in, a cold, eager gleam in his eye. "You ain't got the guts to arrest hot butter with a biscuit! You sure it was Dunnegin? Was he afoot? Whichaway did he go? Why the hell didn't you foller him an' send me word? Spit it out, man!"

"When I spoke to him—ordered him to put up his hands, in fact," puffed the marshal stiffly, "he seemed kinder inclined to foller me instead. That's how I happened to run into Sunk-Face there in the alley with the horses. Sunk-Face told me you were here an'——"

"Damn you for a windy-gutted fool!" Deering stormed. "Never mind how you come here, answer my questions!"

"Give me a chance, blast it! Yes, he was afoot—took the dog with him. Ran with it, in fact. Of course it was dark—only he lit a match [illegible]ntie the dog. I ordered him to put up his hands, but—why—why—why what's this? What's this?"

On the floor Seco McSpadden had groaned and stirred a little. Evidently only now had the flustered marshal noticed him.

"Never mind about this," Deering snapped. "Listen, you lunks! Clay Dunnegin afoot—with a dog—means Clay Dunnegin's still in town. We're wastin' time here. Git out to your horses. Circle the damn town! Pick him up—or by God——"

"I hear Butch Graham tried pickin' ol' Clay up once hisownself," taunted Shorty Tucker. "Now he's countin' devil tails in hell, where he b'longs. Gimme back my keys, Ed, an' I'll lock you boys in here where it's safe!"

Deering wasted no words in answer. Coldly, deliberately he hit Shorty Tucker over the head with his gun.

In another jiffy he had herded his men, including the fat, frightened marshal, outside. Swiftly he stepped outside himself, shoved the key in the lock and turned it.

"There's two of Clay Dunnegin's *amigos* that won't hear him if he hollers!"

He chuckled harshly, hurrying with his men, except for Gordo Simms, to Sunk-Face and the horses.

Scouting, skulking, like wolves of the night, Ed Deering's henchmen threaded the snow-sifty darkness of Las Vegitas, stalking warily into every saloon—and out again; crawling up to peep through the unshaded windows of houses where friends of Clay Dunnegin might have given him refuge; circling the shanty outskirts, the hill trails, searching—searching for a little old trapper-prospector wanted for murder.

"Anybody questions you," Deering had told them, "you been deputized, see? Special deputies, on account the sheriff bein' sick, an' his chief deputy gone yellow. If you find Dunnegin an' he resists arrest, you know what to do. But damn you, find him!"

But there was not a deputy's badge in the bunch—and even at his own outskirts shanty they found no sign of either Dunnegin or his dog.

At the end of an hour they held rendezvous at Pete Du Chene's saloon. Jeeminy Jones, his battered face swollen, cowered in a shadowy corner, but they seemed not even to notice him.

After a few minutes Ed Deering left, alone, buttoning up against the storm. By ones and twos, at easy intervals, loitering a little at the bar, the others followed. When the last one had gone, Jeeminy Jones edged warily, silent as a cat, out into the cask-cluttered back room of the saloon. Softly he opened the door into the blackness of an alley. His teeth chattered like the clacking of dry bones—but not from the cold.

MRS. GILTNER came promptly to the door at Ed Deering's knock, holding high a kerosene lamp.

"Good evenin', Mrs. Giltner," Deering said politely. He slapped the snow from his hat against his leg. "The sheriff was wantin' to see me?"

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"Why—why it's kinder late, Mr. Deering!" She hesitated, but Sheriff Giltner's voice, thin, but clear and confident, called from the bedroom:

"Deering? Bring him in, Marthy. I'll talk to him a minute."

Sheriff Giltner wasted no words in howdies.

"Set down," he said. "I been layin' here thinkin'. Deering, what you know about this Butch Graham killin' yesterd'y?"

Deering twirled his damp hat between his knees.

"Sheriff," he said, "I reckon you know Butch Graham was my friend."

"You hired him—sometimes—to do little jobs for you?"

"Why, yes, I did. In fact——"

"In fact," broke in the sheriff, "he was workin' for you at the time he was killed, wasn't he?"

"Why, yes—he was on my payroll—had been for a month workin' my cattle up in the hills. He was a valuable man to me, sheriff, an'——"

"You figger whoever killed him ought to be caught—an' punished?"

"That's right." Deering's tone was hard. "You know I ain't never been special friends with the law, but there's one point where me an' the law are plumb agreed—Clay Dunnegin done a murder. He's due to hang!"

Sheriff Giltner's thin lips tightened.

"The law," he said, "provides for arrest, fair trial by jury, an' hangin' *if* he's guilty. You don't reckon there's anybody—any of Butch Graham's friends, f'r instance—that'd aim to hang Dunnegin without givin' him his day in court, Deering?"

Deering seemed to listen intently for an instant. Then he relaxed again.

"Sheriff," he said, "there's men in this town that'd string up ol' Dunnegin in a minute—if they got the chance. I guess you don't realize how it's kept me on the jump ever since word of Butch's murder come in, to hold 'em down. I've had to use my fists an' draw my guns to keep 'em from bustin' out after Dunnegin an' stringin' him to the handiest tree, as quick as they find him!"

"Mighty kind of you, Deering," said Sheriff Giltner gravely, smiling ever so faintly. "I reckon that's all I wanted to ask you about right now. Good night!"

"Look here, Sheriff, I know about McSpadden goin' yellow on you. If you'll jest give me his star, deputize me, I'll—— Listen—what's that?" He broke off sharply. From beyond the door came the light *tlap-tlap* sound of dog claws crossing a bare board floor, then a low whine.

"Good night, Deering!" the sheriff came up on his elbows. He spoke sharply. "I reckon this case'll come to trial in due course—without your services. Good night!"

Ed Deering's big frame loomed over him. There was a cold gleam in his eyes.

"Giltner," he said slowly, "this house, with you sick abed, ain't no safe place to keep a murderer prisoner—not with feelin' runnin' high like it is! You've got Dunnegin here! Supposin' the boys—Butch's friends—finds it out? Supposin'—listen here, Sheriff—your main deputy quit you, didn't he? You ain't never had much use for me, but I'll show you I ain't that breed o' dog! Deputize me, an' I'll sneak your prisoner over to the jail—where he'll be safe from lynchin', an' you won't be riskin' a mob bustin' in here."

"Deering," broke in the sheriff quietly, "I think you better put up your hands—you're under arrest!"

With an oath Ed Deering lurched toward the bed. A sixgun appeared like magic from under the covers. But it wobbled in weak fingers. The slam of Deering's fist knocked it spinning.

"No, you don't, Giltner!" he snarled. "I'll——"

A door slammed open. Swift, silent, Mrs. Giltner rushed in. She flung herself like a tiger upon him, striking at his face. One wide sweep of his beefy arm flung her to the floor half across the room. Deering whirled, ran to the nearest win-

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dow, crashing out the broken pane with his boot.

Swift pounding sounded against the door to an adjoining room. A dog yelped excitedly.

"Gilt! Gilt!" came the urgent call in Clay Dunnegin's voice. "Unlock the door. Lemme outa here. I'll tend to him!"

Mrs. Giltner got up, ran stumbling to the door. Her hand was already on the key when Sheriff Giltner's voice stopped her.

"Don't unlock it, Marthy. If you let Clay outa there they'll lynch him, shore! Hand me my gun. God, hand me my gun!"

The sheriff's skinny legs plopped out of bed. He stood up, tottering shakily.

But before Mrs. Giltner could get to the gun on the floor, the locked door splintered open with a crash, and a little grizzly, bald-headed man lunged out, a spotted dog at his heels. His knotty hands got to the gun ahead of Mrs. Giltner's. But already Ed Deering's big bulk had heaved itself out through the shattered window. Yellow gun flame spat back from the snow-grayed darkness where he had leaped. At the same instant Clay Dunnegin hit the floor in a long, lunging sprawl toward the window. Ed Deering's shout rose hoarsely outside.

"Come on, boys! They've got him in here, an' by God, we're goin' to take him!"

SECO McSPADDEN had no idea how long he had lain unconscious. Head, body, arms, legs—he felt as if he had been run over by a herd of shod horses. What bothered him most was that he seemed vaguely to remember hearing some talk about Clay Dunnegin coming after his dog—still being in town. Yes, that was it! Clay's dog had been howling lonesomely, then suddenly the sound had changed to excited yelping, the delighted yelping of a mutt greeting his beloved master.

Seco shook Shorty Tucker. Shorty only groaned. Seco stepped swiftly to the outside door. Locked. He searched Shorty for the keys. They were gone. He wondered ruefully just when and where he had lost his own. There was a key to this door on his ring, too, and he had forgotten to turn it in to Sheriff Giltner when he resigned. He ran to the back door and tried it. Locked.

He found a bucket of water and doused Shorty with it. The jailer sat up, shaking his head groggily.

"Gosh!" he groaned.

"It's a good word," Seco said a little bitterly, "but not strong enough. Snap

out of it, Shorty! Where's your keys?"

"Deering," Shorty groaned, "took 'em. What the hell did you toll him here for, Seco? Gosh dammit, he——"

"Never mind that now," Seco broke in. "Shorty, they're goin' to find ol' Dunnegin, an' lunch him! Lynch him, you savvy, for murder—little ol' Clay that wouldn't harm a fly, if it wasn't bitin' him, but never backed up an inch from nobody if they jumped him. Shorty, we got to git outa here somehow!"

"Got to, hell!" snorted Shorty. "This jail ain't built that way. Gosh, my head!"

Seco examined the heavily barred windows, tugged at the bars with all his strength. They did not even quiver. It looked helpless. Shorty found him a hammer, and he tried battering away the stone in which their ends were sunk. The granite neither chipped nor cracked. It not only looked hopeless—it was hopeless.

"Here's extry guns in the desk," said Shorty, getting them out. "We could try shootin' through the winders, an' maybe somebody——"

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The snow muffled crack of a gunshot broke in on him. Seco's keen ears placed it at once.

"Shorty," he said, and his voice sounded strange and hollow, "that shot was up on the hill—at Sheriff Giltner's. Anything happens to ol' Gilt from all this, God help me, I'm a murderer!"

Grimly he swung the heavy hammer. A thin, half-hand-size chip flew from the granite. An iron bar rattled a little, jarred by the blow. Seco raised the hammer again.

In from the snow-sifty night came a scuffy sound on the plank walk outside. Metal clicked faintly, fumbling against metal, a key grated in the lock of the front door.

Seco dropped the hammer. He leaped to the door, cocking one of the extra guns Shorty had dug from the desk. The door eased open, gently, timidly. The wizened face of Jeeminy Jones, his bare head salty with snow, peered in.

"Don't—don't shoot, Seco. Jeeminy gosh, it's jist me! I come——"

Seco whirled back to the desk, stooping to fill his pockets with ammunition.

"Load up, Shorty! Let's go!"

Swift, ferret-like, Jeeminy Jones stepped inside, slammed the door behind him.

"Hu-hu-here! These keys is yourn, Seco! I—I picked 'em up, y'know, when they knocked me down on the sidewalk an' I rolled over by you. They come back to the saloon a while ago—I heerd 'em talkin'. Jeeminy gosh, Seco! I ain't right bright, but I knowed you didn't shoot ol' Ed this evenin' on account you might of kilt me, too. So when I heerd 'em say you was locked up here at the jail, I figgered I'd come an'—an'—they done gone up to the sheriff's, after ol' Dunnegin. An' Jeeminy, the reason he kilt ol' Butch, Seco, it was on account that——"

"Good boy, Jeeminy!" Seco gave the addled little hombre a swift, approving whack on the shoulder as he strode past. "Tell us about it later. You stay here, now, an' watch the jail for us! Come on, Shorty—we're goin' up the hill!"

UP ON the hill, among the scrub junipers around Sheriff Giltner's house, yellow-red tongues of gun flame licked out through the sifty dark.

Step by step, his anxiety to silence the tongue of Butch Graham's killer once and for all, before it might have a chance to speak in court, had robbed Ed Deering of all his original caution and cunning. From that moment when Seco McSpadden had walked into the yellow lamplight in front of Pete Du Chene's and refused the posse Deering had gathered to go after Dunnegin—to kill him under pretense of trying to arrest him—from that moment Ed Deering's determination had grown in rage and bitterness, until now he had forgotten all caution, all pretense, in one mad, desperate purpose: *get Dunnegin.*

Nor were Deering and his gang the only ones who had now thrown caution to the winds. Seco McSpadden came busting up the hill at a dead run, leaving Shorty Tucker scrambling the slipperiness of the fresh-fallen snow far behind him.

He heard doors slam elsewhere in the village, and the voices of citizens shouting to each other as they rushed out from their firesides to take whatever hand might be required in the unknown gun trouble up on the hill. But Seco was not waiting for help or coöperation now.

A hundred yards from the sheriff's house gun flame stabbed suddenly toward him from the darkness. The shot's flare made ruddy for an instant the snow-silvered branches of a clumpy juniper. Seco swerved, fired twice into the juniper ambush and ran on. A man's voice yowled, cursed. Seco neither stopped nor turned.

Yet as he neared the house, what he saw made him stop, frozen for the moment in his tracks.

The front door had swung suddenly open. Mrs. Giltner stepped out on the porch, a lamp held high in one hand, shad-

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ing her eyes with the other. There was no tremor in her voice. It rang steady and clear as she addressed unseen men in the shadows.

"For shame!" she said. "Carryin' on thisaway with the sheriff sick abed! I can tell you right now, you won't get——"

"To hell with it!" yelled a harsh voice out in the darkness. "Give us Dunnegin. We want that damn' murderer, that's all! Give us——"

"You listen to me!" Mrs. Giltner's voice cut in sharply. "Clay Dunnegin's in the hands of the law! An' I'm speaking for Gilt—for the sheriff. You won't get him as long as——"

A bullet smacked the wall not a yard from Mrs. Giltner's head.

"Grab the woman!" somebody yelled. "Then I'll bet they'll turn over that old coot."

All in the same instant that Seco McSpadden started crawling on his hands and knees, afraid to rush in upright now lest he trip off some trigger of impatience that would mean Mrs. Giltner's death, the short, bowlegged figure of Clay Dunnegin showed in the door, his hands high above the ruddy sheen of his bald head.

"Hold it, boys," his voice twanged out. "Git back in the house, Miz Giltner. I'm givin' up—'fore somebody gits hurt."

Black man shapes rose from the shadows into the rim of light, Ed Deering's huge bulk among them.

"Come on out, then," he ordered.

The woman with the lamp stood decisively, square in front of the little bald-headed man, shielding him. In a swift arc she swung the lamp, flung it into the faces of the men crowding up to the porch.

From a dozen feet away Seco McSpadden leaped into action. Before Deering's men could know that he was among them, or that he was not one of them, he gained the steps of the porch, whirled and began shooting.

The night flared alive with gun flame. Back of him Seco heard the door slam shut. He could only guess that it meant Clay Dunnegin had seized Mrs. Giltner and forced her back into the house. The next instant Seco knew that he was no longer fighting alone.

It had taken but a second for Seco to empty his gun. There was no chance to reload. Some of his shots, he knew, had done business. He knew, too, that he himself had been hit. But all he saw, by the flare of a shot, all he knew, all he cared, was that the big bulk of Ed Deering crouched at the end of the porch steps, a flash of gun flame gleaming for a hundredth second on the wetness of the six-gun in his hands, waiting, wary again now, for a deadly certain shot.

Seco McSpadden came from his crouch behind the porch posts in a long, panther-ish leap. The force of his head, smacking like a cannon ball into Deering's face, jarred him to the toes, sweeping him with a numbing dizziness. But Deering had toppled under him, and Seco's hands found his gun. With all the strength he had, he forced it and the hand that held it to the ground. Grunting, the two men strained for its possession, their hands slippery with the cold snow-wetness.

"Sunk-Face!" Deering let out a squall. "Come here an'——"

Somehow Seco brought up his leg. The boot heel stomped hard on Deering's wrist. The gun slipped from his grasp. Seco's toe kicked out, struck it away.

Deering lunged gruntingly to his feet. Now it was man to man, and in the dark. Silent but for the windy panting of his breath, Seco lunged upon him again. There was a sudden flare of gun flame—the roar of six-shooters, again, as they went down, and from somewhere near him, on the porch, the thin, stern voice of Sheriff Giltner, calling out his name.

And that was the last Seco McSpadden knew for a while.

IT WAS about all that Shorty Tucker and Clay Dunnegin could do to pry loose the vise of Seco McSpadden's fingers

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from their choking grip on Ed Deering's big, thick neck.

They got Ed Deering to his feet, but even then, as they marched him into the house, Seco, dazed but walking stiff as a ramrod, held onto him. He shook his head, blinking at the lamp light. He saw Sheriff Giltner's spindly legs dangling from under a bathrobe where he sat on the bed.

"Gilt—Sheriff," said Seco McSpadden, "I was wrong, quittin' you thataway. I jest somehow couldn't——"

Fresh scuffling sounds arose from the hallway, the door banged open. His eyes rolling wildly over his puffy cheeks, Town Marshal Simms marched in. He marched stiffly, selfconsciously—and no wonder. Behind him, gun barrel snugged to his back, marched Jeeminy Jones.

"Brung 'im, I did, by Jeeminy! He fit me, but I brung 'im, Sher'ff. He—he'll tell you! He's got the money—right on him!"

Ed Deering, handcuffed to his chair, guarded by two citizens with guns, snarled like a trapped wolf.

And trapped wolf he was, now.

"By jeeminy, he'll talk, ol' Gordo will," chattered Jeeminy Jones. "He'll——"

"Jest a minute first," broke in the twangy voice of Clay Dunnegin. He came and stood before Seco McSpadden while Mrs. Giltner and Shorty Tucker cut away the shirt and dressed the bullet-ripped flesh along Seco's lean ribs. The grizzly little old prospector already had one of his arms in a sling from Ed Deering's pot shot back through the window.

"Seco," said Clay Dunnegin, "I kilt Butch Graham. I kilt him fair an' honest, because he'd come aimin' to kill me. He bragged on it, the durn fool, an' told me who sent him, figgerin' he had me covered, dead to rights. But I fooled him. An' when I seen I'd kilt him dead, I got kinder panicky at first an' taken out to the hills, hidin' myself away. Then I got to thinkin': the ol' sheriff's sick, so he'll send Seco out to fetch me. Only maybe ol' Seco won't take the job. But if he does—an' comes in the night—how will I know fer sure if it's him or some of Deering's hombres? Nossir, I'll jest be makin' a lot of trouble fer ever'body, I thinks.

"So I made up my mind to come in an' give up, even at the risk of gittin' mobbed. Well, I heard my dog howlin', so I sneaked over past Mandy Jason's, where I'd left him, aimin' jest to kinder console him, an' come on over here. But he whined so to foller me, that I let him. Then I come here.

"'Sheriff,' I says, 'I'm surrenderin' peaceable, but I better git on over to the jail jest to avoid possible trouble fer you—you sick abed an' all.' But damn if ol' Gilt don't crack down an' lock me up right here, claimin' he wouldn't let me risk walkin' over to the jail alone fer fear a mob might git me. But he'd done sent word for Deering to come see him, so when Deering showed up he figgered he better let him in, to kinder keep him from gittin' suspicious. Well, ol' Spot had to git noisy, an' Deering learnt I was here, an' old Gilt tried to arrest him an'—well, hell jest come unshucked around here, that's all. If you hadn't 'a' come when you did——"

"I'd ought to have been here all the time," Seco broke in shamefacedly, "only I——"

"Only on account of gettin' lynched an' locked up in the jail an' one thing another," grinned Shorty Tucker, "he was jest too busy."

"Seco," old Dunnegin went on gravely, "I jest want to thank ye for the way you felt about arrestin' me. 'Course I done the killin' but——"

"Damn right you did!" snarled Ed Deering. "An' you'll hang for it, too, if I have to——"

"You won't have to do nothin', Deering," broke in Sheriff Giltner from the bed, "except stand trial for hiring Butch Graham to kill Dunnegin; your purpose, from what Graham spouted off to Dunnegin, bein' to eliminate the possibility of ol' Clay reportin' some calf rustlin' he'd been seein' you at,

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up in the hills! On the murder charge, Deering, Dunnegin'll come clear!"

"Clear hell!" Deering's sneer was shot through with bravado. "How's he gonna prove what he claims Butch told him? Butch is dead, an'——"

"Jeeminy," broke in Jones anxiously. "Jeeminy, Sher'ff! Look, y'know—here's ol' Gordo! He's got the money right on him. Ol' Gordo's been kickin' me around for years, he has."

"The money?" asked Seco, suddenly alert again.

"Jeeminy, yes!" chattered Jones. "The money ol' Ed paid to ol' Butch to go kill ol' Clay for him! Ol' Gordo, he follered Butch out to snoop on him, an' report back to ol' Ed if Butch done the job right. Jeeminy! I hear a heap of things around the saloon—even if I ain't so bright—so I jest follered ol' Gordo, myownself. I seen him take the money off'n ol' Butch after ol' Dunnegin kilt him. I never said nothin'; but tonight—jeeminy, ol' Seco kinder saved my life, sort of. So I jest got to figgerin' if ol' Gordo still had the money, maybe I could make him bust loose an' tell——"

"For God's sake," boomed Town Marshal Simms suddenly, "quit ramming that gun in my back and shut up!" He cleared his throat pompously. "Sheriff," he said, "in return for—er—er—the mercy of the court—I—I'll testify to the facts—that Butch Graham was employed by Ed Deering to kill Dunnegin."

"Good," said Sheriff Giltner. "Now I——"

"Now," broke in his wife, giving Seco's bandages a last little pat, "you'll go to bed, Mr. Sheriff!"

"All right, Marthy." Sheriff Giltner grinned. "But first—you still got that star handy that you picked up out under the window? Why, I been kinder studyin' about this here question of the law versus friendship since I throwed that badge out there this afternoon. Shorty, will you an' Clay hold Chief Deputy McSpadden down while Marthy pins it back on him?"

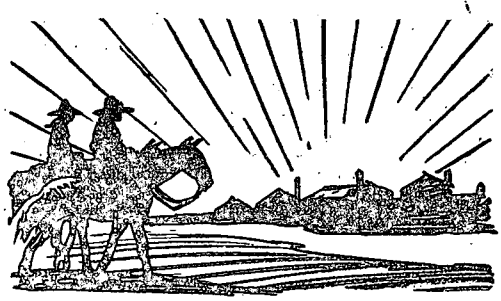
In the next issue——

SHORT STORIES *for April 10th*

Part I of a New Serial—

Introducing Badger and Blizzard—two fighting men of the Pan-handle, who tackle a bad town and prove to the satisfaction of all but the bad men that—

Rangers Is Powerful Hard to Kill



by

CADDO CAMERON

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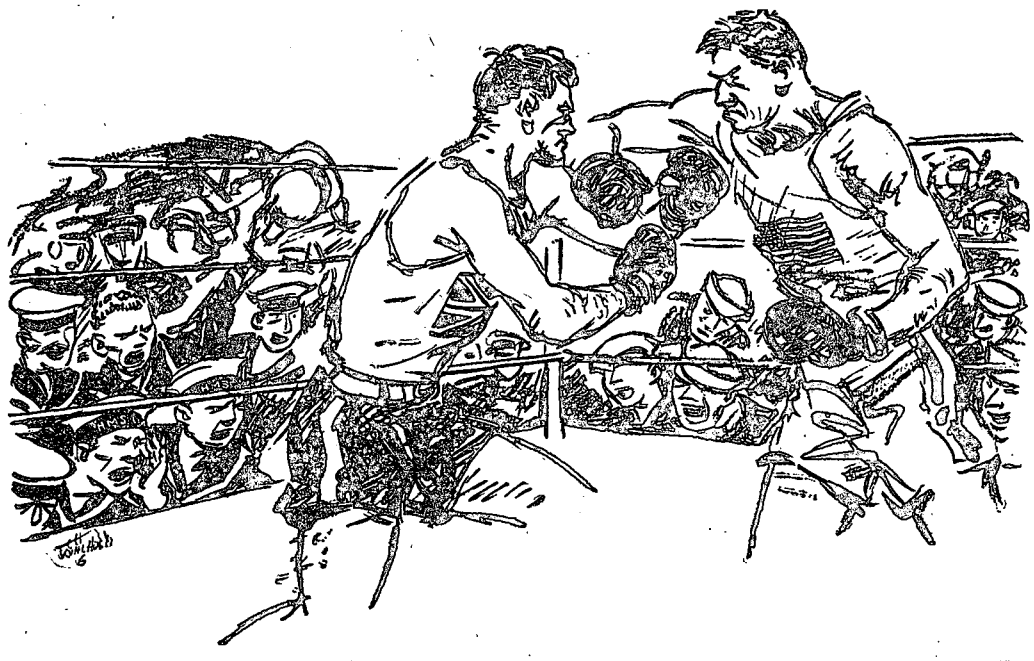
Any Time Somebody Wants To Bet They Can Lick the Navy—and That's the Splinter Boats—Take 'Em Up, Kid. It Can't Be Did

THE BATTLE OF HISTORY

By RAY MILLHOLLAND

Author of "Way Enough," "Cap Wetherby's Rubber Eyes," and Other Stories of the Splinter Boats



BEING a couple of hounds for the slug and clinch pastime, naturally old Robby and me coughed up a shilling six-pence for front seats at the massacre. War was going on, of course, or old Robby and me wouldn't have been in Malta on that gloomy May day to see the whole wad of the Splinter Fleet go down on our heavyweight champ—yes, and stay down. Both.

We sat there and watched our lights and welters knock the ticking loose from all the Lime-juice mattresses in the small-time classes. In fact, I was enjoying myself waiting for the main go to be called by counting up the shillings and pound notes in my CPO cap. They was special money because the mob of beery British sailors we was in the midst of, kept putting their money where their mouth was every time a new boy of ours climbed through the ropes and took a laugh at the set-up trying to scare him with a dirty look from the Union Jack corner.

"Now we're going to see something," I says to old Robby sitting hunched over beside me. Back a couple of centuries before the war spoiled raking in side-money for us gobs, I used to manage old Robby in the bouts staged around Sand Street in

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Brooklyn. And right when we were banking an extra hundred apiece every month some dirty fight promoter rung in an iron-headed guy for a go with old Robby. Me and old Robby fought him to a twilight snooze, but we came out of it with a pair of busted hands that made scrub-and-wash-clothes out of our side-graft. Old Robby got the busted hands, of course, and I took a horrible beating in my worry factory. He still says I got more gray hairs over that disaster than he did. Anyways, old Robby and me never put my brains and his science to any more profit.

"Watch out blood don't spatter all over you," I says to old Robby as our Splinter Fleet champ crawls through the ropes and gives me the closing eye after lamping the British Broadside lumped over in his corner and pretending to chew up a ship's anchor or two by way of showing what was coming to us.

Right then I feels a tap on my shoulder. One of them kind of taps that comes from a bum you don't like before you ever see his ugly mug breathing down your neck.

"I say, matey. What's the nime of the Yankee struttin' so proud and haughty to his funeral?"

I looks around at the Lime-juicer and says, "That's Hervey Loving, sailor. And he's going to tear that red-faced camel apart before the fourth round," I adds from the side of my mouth to old Robby.

"'Ervey Loving!" pipes the Limey, coy and bashful. "Gorlumme, what a lovey-dovey name he has!"

"They put all the foolishness in his name," I smacks back. "And if you don't believe it, cover this—" I holds up my fist with fifty English pounds in it—my dough and what I'd bleached out of the mob of optimists setting on my sta'board beam, now broke and stunned worse than if the roof had caved in on them.

"Not so free with the church-plate stuff," warns old Robby in my ear. "Our mug can sock, but the British Broadside ain't got his arches riveted to the deck, I notice."

According to the articles of doing business, I should've listened to old Robby's warning. He has more box-fight science in one black-head on the back of where his neck ought to be than anybody else knows.

But I was in too deep by then to back out and admit an American could do anything but wipe the earth with the best the British Mediterranean Fleet could throw in the ring.

"Usual odds every American gets," I says. "Five to three on a knockout."

"By the end of the fourth round," the Limey haggles. "You can't back down on that. I overheard you say it to your matey just now."

Which makes the silver propeller on my CPO chevron smoke, I was that hot hearing the mug admit he had been listening in on my private business with old Robby.

Then Robby jabs me in the ribs. "Put a slow bell on your blamed gab," he grunts.

"Fifty pounds against thirty," I slaps back in the face of the Limey behind us, getting old Robby's advice all right, but not using it. "And the fourth round ends it," I adds when I saw the punk stalling for breeze.

WELL, they scrambles around under their jumpers—the Limey big-mouth and his pals—and we all dumps our dough in my hat and gives it to a Scotch dock-yard foreman I'd seen when we was in drydock. "Hold the stakes," I says to the Sandy. "And if our Indian-chaser don't maul the living daylights out of the British Broadside by the end of the fourth, hand back my empty cap."

The first round wasn't much to write home about. Hervey Loving went slogging across the ring and belted the British Broadside with a smash on the head you could hear echo for ten seconds. The big derrick had steam up on all boilers. And he socked, wild and plenty. But either the British Broadside caught 'em on his armor-plated conning tower or he rode 'em going away. They just didn't toll no funeral bells, that's all.

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Second and third rounds was no better. That left, and them shifting dogs under the British Broadside, kept Hervey Loving from knocking a hole right through him with his left jab, to say nothing of a right that screamed like a liner's siren when he cut loose with it. But no dice. There wasn't an intentional blow hit.

"You heard the thunder," I tosses back over my shoulder to a glum bunch of beef-eaters behind me. "Now watch made-in-America lightning strike something."

Pow! There it came, quick as that. I slewed my turret around for a good gloat. *Yah!* I come to in a minute and batted my eyes.

"Who hit our little friend with a battle-wagon anchor?" I gags at old Robby.

"Him," says he, nodding his head at the British Broadside in a neutral corner and pumping his dukes as he watched Hervey Loving curl up on the canvas like wet chip. "Barely kissed him with a right hook to the chin," adds old Robby to make the slaughter of my soul that much more agony.

"Gimme my empty hat," I says to the Scotchman, and me and old Robby sneaks out for a breath of Maltese air, with no more spirit than a fishworm trying to bore into a steel deck.

"Some day you'll learn," gripes old Robby, "It ain't the climate what makes a champ. It's what he's got under his right thumb that makes bums out of wisenheimers like you."

I let it pass. Let it pass—too numb just then to remember a guy with a brain can always cluck the dough back into his chicken yard. So I fights the ruination over, blow-by-blow, with old Robby on our way past all the swell lit-up gin mills to the old splinter boat.

"If the war was over," I begins mooning, "I'd get a contract out of that siege gun and take him to the States and make a million out of the heavyweight title. He's the world's best right now."

"Nothing but a second-rater," comes back from old Robby. "I watched him all through the fight. He's got a glass chin. Seen him ice-eyed twice when Loving barely grazed it. A good smack there would stop him in the middle of a wink."

Just a hint like that was all I needed from an old fox like Robby. So, before we shoved off from Malta for our job of chasing Kraut submarines back home to their mammas, I fixes it up with our fleet athletic officer to arrange a return bout for July Fourth—the British Broadside to meet any man the Splinter Fleet tossed into the ring with him. Fair enough. We got the promise of a return match.

ALONG about the first week in June, I was leaning over the rail trying to figure out what was making my fire and bilge pump engine knock like a rivet hammer when I looks across Corfu harbor and sees the Limey cruiser *Weymouth* dump her mud hook.

"That reminds me," I says to old Robby. "The British Broadside is a coal heaver on that packet. We got to dig up another man to smack him flat when we celebrate licking the English at the Battle of Bull Run."

Any reference to important dates in history like that always gives me the high sign on old Robby. He never reads none of the literature in the *Police Gazette*—only the pictures.

"How about training up the Swede?" old Robby suggests. "Loving had all the fight knocked out of him back in Malta. I know, because I've had the gloves on with him a few times aboard the *Leonidas*. Never had no science, and now his guts ain't there for it."

"Several objections to the Swede," I professions. "First place, Anderson ain't no name the British run from at the Battle of Timbuctoo. Second place," I throws in for a clincher, "the Swede's brains ain't mates. He only does what you tell him, and then turns to look for more orders. If he ran out in the middle of a round with the British Broadside—curtains."

"I don't think a man living can knock the Swede out—and off his number

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twelves," states old Robby in a way you could bet a million on for a sure thing.

"Then get busy with him," I says, setting up shop right then. "You begin teaching the Swede to fight, while I look after business arrangements. How much pay you got in your ditty box?"

By doing a lot of missionary work and ballyhoo through the Splinter Fleet, I collected up about a thousand gaskets more or less and left sure-thing promises behind

enough to get me killed twice in every port we made shore liberty in for two hitches in this man's navy. You can promise a sailor anything afloat, but when you meet him in a dark alley in some Spick port you better be able to cough up the dough he bet on your man, or else— Not much else, either.

"We need road work for the Swede's wind," old Robby was griping the week before the scrap with the British Broadside.

"Go on," I says. "Put another ten pounds into each diver's shoe you got him dressed up in when he spars. Let him sweat himself into condition."

That was my bright idea about training the Swede with a forty-pound diving shoe on each foot. It was to strengthen his legs and make him smart with his hands when old Robby and the other sailors in our splinter boat crew punched at him. "When we take off them anchors," I kept telling old Robby, "the Swede will feel like he had balloons for feet. Foot work? He'll be a race horse in the ring without 'em. Just watch."

Well, the war went right along like it always seems to do in spite of an important box-fight ashore. We had to duck back out on the Otranto Barrage and hunt subs just the same. The only concession we got was permission from Old Copper Guts our force commander to slip in through the mine nets on the Third, so's we could have our man-eating Swede dubbed down for the fight the next morning. Ten was the hour the riot was staged for.

On the First—just three days to the big fight—old Robby tells the Swede to hit the deck this time without his diving gear.

"Now tear right into me," he says with his chin down inside his collar bone to the Swede. "Buzz right at it and see how far over Fano Island you can lift my can with that left hook I taught you."

Blam! goes the Swede with his left. Old Robby ducked it neat and countered with his old one-two that set the big Promise back on his heels. *Zip!* he whistles a right-cross that set up a ripple on the water.

"Good one," grunts old Robby. "I saw it coming and took the tail end of it just to see what you had, Swede. Cough, cough!" he goes, and catches his wind. "Now some more of the same. Only this time, watch out. I'm going to smack you around some myself if you open up."

You know, it made me think of old times to see old, spavined Robby work those three training rounds with the Swede. He had his old looping right going like an oil tanker on fire, but keeping the dynamite cap out of his glove so as not to really blast our rye-bread ticket over the side by accident. At the end of three fast rounds, Old Robby called it off and told the Swede if he could keep up that pace for six rounds, he was high cockalorum in the Mediterranean with a chance of making a big name for himself back in the States—if we ever got back.

"Like old times," I says to old Robby as I give him one of my special rub-downs while the gun crew massaged the Swede. "How's the old bones in your dukes?"

Old Robby cracks his knuckles a few times to make sure and grunts, "Pretty

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good, I guess. But don't kid yourself, sailor. I ain't slamming my fives on no squarehead. I delivered to the soft places only."

All good old-timers are like that. Once they've made a boneyard of their hands on the way down and out, they quit smacking for a guy's ivory and lay 'em in where there's padding. I noticed him doing that whenever we got sociable ashore with a detail of leathernecks from the Marine barracks in Brooklyn navy yard. He was free with his punches, but always put 'em where they did the most damage to anybody but him.

"So the Swede is ripe, eh?" I gloats as I finish rubbing old Robby down. "So you think I wasn't so bug-house posting a thousand side-bet on him? Changed your tune, unh?"

"He'll kill the Broadside if they let him," comes the good news from old Robby. "Our boy can take anything and hit like a sixteen-inch shell. That idea of making him wear diver's lead on his feet was a wow. He's fast, sailor. Plenty."

You can imagine the swell feelings I had over that news. Old Robby is a regular wizard at doping a fighter's condition and stuff. One thousand smackers was in the bag for us, I believed, right then. To say nothing of the glory of licking the English like we did at the Battle of Copenhagen.

Well, it wasn't so sure after all. If you get what I mean.

WHAT did the Swede do but climb up in the crow's-nest for his watch and start looking for submarines. It was a swell afternoon for a picnic in a nice canoe with the victrola going and a cute twist passing chicken sandwiches over to you between drinks of cold beer. It was that peaceful out there on the Adriatic, I mean.

I waited until the Swede had crawled up in his little nest, scared to death his foot would slip and he'd fall down out of there and pull a muscle. He couldn't be killed just falling twenty feet, but he could get slowed up by it. Soon as I saw he was all secure, I eased aft to my engine room to see how my black gang was getting along washing down the paint-work in the engine room.

We was listening for subs right then, and that meant all my machinery was shut down. You listen for subs with a brass gadget stuck down through the bottom in the forward magazine. It has two arms sticking out from it with rubber balls on the ends fixed to copper tubes that run up inside the ship. A sailor called a listener has a doctor's stethoscope stuck in his ears and connected to these copper tubes. When he hears a sub sloshing along under water, he turns his brass gadget till he hears the sound in both ears. When he has the direction, he yaps to the bridge. The rest is just making a couple of more fixes like that—gabbing into the radio telephone and telling all the other chasers about it, and then getting their story back on your chart. Bingo, you've got an "X" where the body is going to rest damn soon! And I don't mean maybe, either.

I was hoping the listener in the magazine was asleep and wouldn't hear no sub if there was one. Hunting subs is slightly dangerous sometimes. One of them Mark Two ash cans can fall off the stern too easy and blow up half a state before any splinter boat over the hole can sell out. Not to mention that most subs in those days carried two healthy sized guns which outranged and out-shot the dinky three-incher old Robb's deck hands worked without regard to union hours.

It was quiet as a beer party after the keg goes dry and everybody is taking a nap, when the blockheaded Swede pulls a boner and spots a sub's periscope. Yea, the listener was asleep all right or else the sub was pulling that foxy one about running at eighty-six turns on one screw and ninety-one or three on the other—odd numbers like that—and was sneaking through the barrage as quiet as a mouse in a feather factory.

We was about five miles out of position when the Swede lets go his hail from the

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crow's-nest. That brought all hands on deck and the S-C tube in the magazine banging up and secured for a quick rush. And did I have business in the engine room right after that!

All I could do was to pour it to my three big gas engines and try to hope above the shriek of the air rushing into three carburetors—big enough to raise a goat in—and hope there wouldn't be any shooting.

THE sub should've dived and legged it for mamma like most of 'em generally did. But not this piece of tinsmithing. He lamped the view from his periscope and got fightish when he saw nothing on the Big Drink but one scrawny splinter boat with a gun forward of her chart house not big enough to make a good anchor for his rubber life raft.

So up he comes, and tosses a flock of shrapnel shells at us. His first burst was miles wide. But he had the regular Dutchman's gripe about wasting anything useful and cut down on us and burst one too close for making a joke out of it.

Old Robby tucks a nasty one into the breech of our three-incher and sights her himself.

Blam! Yoweee! I hear clear down in the engine room. It sounded like two prelim boys uncorking at the same time—both getting one in the front row of ivories. One of my machinist mates takes a pair of pliers and picks up a piece of hot steel that came through the engine room trunk with all the noise. The thing sizzled when he stuck it under a water jacket pet cock to cool it down.

The sight of that hunk of shrapnel shell-body made me nervous. I could see, like he was right in front of me, the Swede all full of leaks in his bilges where the balance of that shell had wandered through him. And I could see a thousand bucks of loyal American dough wandering off with what missed him. To say nothing of having to watch the English whip the daylights out of some substitute-fighter we'd have to toss into the ring on the Fourth. Some punk the British Broadside would lick worse than we did the English at the Battle of—aw, where we licked 'em with the Charge of the Light Brigade. I've got the picture around some place, but I can't find it right now.

But old Robby ain't the guy to let somebody else do all the punching. He slammed right back and took enough off the sub's conning tower with a high-explosive to make a guy rich if he could've hauled it to a junk yard and peddled it, even at hot prices. That was enough for the sub. She did the live sardine act and hauled ashes out of there. It was smart, too. Eleven other splinter boats in Division One heard the disturbance and hustled over to crash the gate. It was like introducing a neat trick in calico to all your bachelor friends. First thing we knew, we was crowded out of the party by the late-comers and the sub was unsalvageable before we could grab a souvenir apiece.

"Swell work with the old gas pipe," I says to old Robby after the little trouble was over with. We were standing on the bridge behind the chart house and I had just sounded my fuel tanks to make sure we had plenty to run back to Corfu on. "Swell work, but not good business," I says loud enough for the Swede up in the crow's-nest to hear and take benefit. "With a big fight on the calendar for day-after tomorrow, we can't have our man straining himself dodging scrap iron or losing sleep from worry over not doing it——"

I was going to say some more. But I didn't. Just as I screwed the cap on the port tank riser a drop of blood spattered down from the crow's-nest on my hand. I knew I was sunk before I looked up and saw the Swede leaning over the weather screen rail of the crow's-nest holding a bloody right shoulder.

We helped him down like he was a busted piece of museum china—valuable as hell but not worth a hoot for immediate use. You could have scraped more gloom off my chin than blood off the Swede's shirt. Yah! It had to go that way. The

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only guy to get a scratch had to be him, and the battle of history just a few days off.

"Where was your foot-work, you big pork-and-beaner?" I growls at him as soon as I saw he could grin in spite of the ragged meat of his shoulder. "Don't you know enough to shift when it starts your way?"

I was just kidding him. Honest. Right then, I didn't care about the thousand comforters we had donated to the English or all the times I would have to walk in the middle of the main drag in every port from then on to keep clear of sailors on shore liberty with a grudge on their books against me. I just felt proud the big ox he could take it like that without a grunt as we sluiced him with raw iodine and lashed his bum wing to his barrel.

BUT glory don't win box-fights. Not against the English when they have the British Broadside to eat up whoever walks into the ring with him. Nine o'clock of the morning of the fight, I had no idea at all of who would step in there and lose dough and friendships for me. I tried stirring Hervey Loving up into a do-or-die fit for the old Flag. But he went cold on me before I named his opponent. Nothing stirring there.

Well, I followed old Robby down to the ringside and picked ourselves good seats on a nice soft rock that had been growing no moss on Corfu Island for a couple of centuries, anyways.

"We're game, anyways," I mourns to Old Robby, hunched over beside me. "We'll watch our light boys hash 'em up like we beat the English at the Battle of French Lick. Then we'll step up and concede the heavyweight bout on default. We'll be game. I got the dough right here under my vest to hand over."

All through the prelim bouts, old Robby sat there grinding one fist into the other and staring at the ground under his feet. He wasn't thinking, because I never saw the big clown think. He just sat there and stared, grinding his fist and never looking up even to see who it was bumping the canvas for the count.

I just sat there like a guy up to fry on a hot seat, waiting for the announcer to climb thfough the ropes and call for the final battle between the British Broadside and the American contender for the championship of the Mediterranean.

And right then, that same mean finger stabbed me in the back like it did in Malta. Sure enough, there was that beer-guzzling swab of a Lime-juicer giving me the office.

"Where's your lovey-dovey, Yankee?" he asks me.

Everybody by then had taken their eyes off the British Bomber who had come into the ring and was craning necks to look for our man.

"The next bout," yells the announcer, "is for the heavyweight title of the Mediterranean. The British Broadside in this corner will fight the American contender ——"

I jumped to my feet and opened my yap to call the match forfeited.

But old Robby beat me to it. "The contender is Red Robert!" he roars, shucking his clothes like a dancer of the Seven Veils. "Get me some shoes off the other guys," he says slapping my collapsing back.

I was still gagged when I got through taping his hands and shoved them into his gloves.

"Look at me," I finally says to the old wreck. "You never did think—but this is the first and lousiest idea you ever sprung on me. There ain't no sense in going in there and getting your head beat off."

He didn't grin back. He didn't say nothing. He just let me tie on his mitts and then leaned back on the ropes, waiting. I hopped out of the ring and took my station behind his post and started shooting the old strategy at the back of where his neck ought to be.

"Right off the bat, hand him what he's never seen before," I orders. "You can't possibly last four rounds. Even if you do, you can't win. That guy has been doing road work over a mile of cruiser deck. Put

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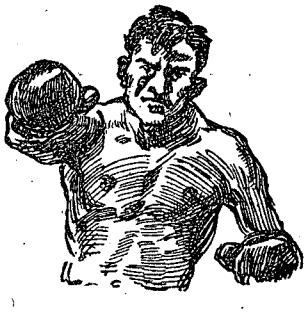
the old Red Ripper to him at the handshake and win before he opens his eyes. You can do it, kid. It's easy. Save yourself all the work of carrying him any further."

There was no time to put over the hot psychology stuff. I just had to ram big ideas to him in a bunch. A thousand bucks is one thousand—you know that without my telling it so much, anyways.

JUST as the bell sounded, old Robby throws me a grin and says, "Fish out the ten pounds pinned inside my shirt. Get five to one, I knock him glass-eyed in the fourth."

Was he dizzy? You can tell the angels I knew he was! But I couldn't cross-up a shipmate. So I baled out the dough and waved it around my Lime-juicer curse from Malta. He bit pretty slow. Said he'd like to see Round One over before he plunged his crowd that deep. One of them sure-thing boys. Yah! British sportsmanship—same old tripe you hear around every ring. It ain't there, kid; it ain't there in no country.

The next second, and I forgot all about placing that bet. Old Robby came shuffling



out of his corner and made the British Broadside rush a long mile across the ring to him. Then—*Blam!* He torpedoed the big beef-eater with a left body hook that bulged out the guy's backbone. Honest. The champ met it coming in and it took him all of a surprise. He began fighting. And how he could fight, that baby!

Old Robby looked like he had clean forgot about his bet on the fourth round. He was taking my advice and dishing out new ones this British Broadside wouldn't have been able to spell out if he'd seen 'em in a book. He saw everything the gob from Sand Street had but old Robby's looping right hand. That's his punch that starts in the water bucket in our corner and keeps whizzing till it happens on the other guy, someplace. Where don't matter, so it lands.

"You almost had him with that first punch," I says to old Robby at the end of the round. I baled more air to him with the towel and watched his eyes. "Doing fine," I encourages. "He's afraid of you or you would've smacked him out in the first round like we planned."

"Fourth!" old Robby slaps right back. He looks close at me to make sure I wasn't kidding. "Does he look like he's leery of my right? No bunk, now. I want the straight soup."

"A guy like that ain't scared," I had to honest up. "But he sure is respectful of that right. He won't raise his chin for it till he has to."

The bell cut us short. Old Robby bounced clear across the ring this time and threw leather all over the British Broadside. But there was no chloroform in his punches. I could see that, and down goes my heart from way down where it started in the fight from the first place. The champ starts blazing right back. He walked Old Robby across the ring with the crowd howling the old cry for the meat-axe.

He had me almost believing old Robby wasn't riding out his punches the way they smacked into him. The British Broadside saw the fight coming his way and bored in some more. Twice he had old Robby on the ropes covering up with six elbows. I turned my head. It was beginning to look like a murder in the Old People's Home.

Then that poke in the back reached me again. The Lime-juicer was waving fifty honest-to-gosh English pounds in his fist and calling for me to make good on my bet.

"Nix," I said with no politeness. "You had your chance. Think I'm giving money away?"

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He gives me a nasty sneer and laughs over his shoulder at his mates around him. "See there?" he says, pointing the finger of scorn on me. "There's your welching Yankee sportsmanship for you. This blighter made a bet, and now he won't show his money!"

I just turned my back and let 'em yap at me for the rest of the round. How old Robby rode it out, I couldn't see for the life of me. I pumped wind to him and kept my trap shut.

"Bet—that—ten?" he gasped between breaths.

"Sure, I did. And we're winning it," I lied.

OUT I clears from the ring and crouches back of our corner as Round Three exploded. The Lime-juicer behind me got noisy and begin telling his opinion of all dollar-grabbing Yankees to the wide world.

"Put your money where your mouth is," I turns loose on him, and shoves old Robby's ten pounds into the ship's doctor's hands as stakeholder.

Smacko, came the English money on top of it. And did them Limies smile at the sucker I knew I was!

Round Three, no dice. The British Broadside was wised up to all old Robby tossed his way. And the old Sand Street battler was doing nothing, it looked like, but boxing and blocking.

"I can't see so good," old Robby says to me as I pulled the towel at him after the round. "What color is that mug's mid-section? White or pink?"

"Neither," I reports after a quick look. "Red as a beet. Why?"

No answer. No time. Bell for the Fourth caught me with one heel still under the ropes. I just hung around trying to forget how bad old Robby looked shuffling out of his corner. With a tin cup and a cane, he would have been convincing as all get out.

Then he uncorked one. I never saw it start. I never saw it land. Just heard the smack and saw the British Broadside bounce clear across the ring—and land on his feet. He came right back at old Robby, fighting. It was all up, I figured. Old Robby had slammed him with a right to the midsection that would have uncoupled Jim Jeffries or any of the big-timers in their day. And the guy comes right back for more.

He hammers old Robby around the ears with a double one-two. It looked like curtains for a minute. Then, slam! goes the old left into the British Broadside's mid-section. He saw the right coming there, too—and dropped both hands to stop it. He'd taken all he could stomach in that end of his butcher shop.

There ain't no more to the scrap. Old Robby saw him drop both hands to cover his burning mid-section. Yep, he dipped his right mitt way back in our water bucket and threw it away. And when it happened on the button of the British Broadside's jaw, I was already reaching over for the fifty pounds my Lime-juicer chummie from Malta had made us a present of.

So I unlaced the gloves from old Robby's dukes and tried to pull off the right one. No soap. We had to split it. His hand was swelled up the size of a kosher ham.

"When did this happen?" I asks him, feeling the busted bones grate when I moved 'em.

"Just now," he grunts, yanking it away. "I hit the soft spots up to the last. When I hit bone, the old knuckles busted. Just like I knew they would."

Well, I was the candy kid with the Splinter Fleet after that. We licked the English worse than we did at the Battle of Waterloo. And if you know your history, that was some scrap. But I played percentages all the way. I had my history down pat and played the champ as the favorite. Any time, kid, somebody wants to bet they can lick the Navy, kid, take 'em up. It can't be did.

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The "Island Queen" Snored Across a Calm, Warm Sea, but Aboard Her Was Turmoil, Mystery and Death

IN THE MIDDLE WATCH

Conclusion

ABOARD the *Island Queen*—freight and passengers from Malaysia to San Francisco—is too much mystery. In her safe are jewels belonging to a certain rajah who is sending them to America for sale, and Sinclair, whose amiable, pink cheeked appearance is deceptive, is aboard to protect them. The first officer meets his death, the ship's course is strangely altered, a passenger named Donatello sends off a mysterious wireless message, and another passenger is killed while trying to open the ship's safe. Sinclair recognizes the latter gentleman as an international crook of considerable reputation, and the man who caused his death is Sintang, a Malay, who claimed self-defense. So——

CHAPTER IV

TOO MUCH MYSTERY

TELL me," said Sinclair amiably, as he and Sintang left the bridge. "Tell me, just why did you kill Prescott?"

The Malay smiled faintly and lifted his shoulders in a shrug.

"Self-defense, as I said. Would you stand idle and let a man shoot you?"

"Prescott was supposed to be a crack

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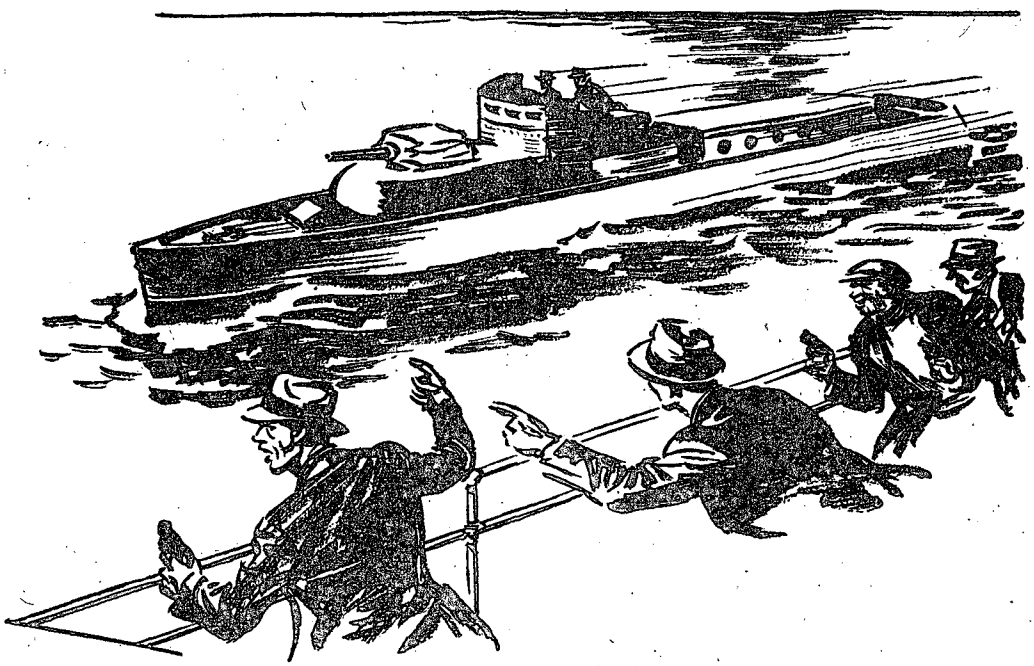

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

Author of
"Barry Lark's Treasure," and Many Other Stories of Perilous Seas

shot," Sinclair murmured. "Or rather I should say Souter was. It's queer he missed."

"Perhaps he was nervous," suggested Sintang smiling. They both halted as from a common impulse outside the saloon doorway. "Captain Brandon believes me, at least."

"I wouldn't dream of doubting you," Sinclair assured him. "But I would like to know just why the good captain vouches for you. Or shall I make a guess?"

"I would be delighted to know," the Malay murmured. Sinclair chuckled.

"I think we are both working to the same end, Sintang," he said frankly. "No need for all the mystery. You joined the *Island Queen* at Lintapon. You are a Malay gentleman. I suspect a relation of the Raja of Balok."

The other watched the plump white man with liquid bright eyes and he was still smiling. He neither denied nor affirmed the statement.

"And you?" he said. Sinclair drew hard on his cigar.

"In a short while," he said, "I shall come to your room. Perhaps then we can talk."

Sintang nodded and they stepped [illegible] the saloon together, the Malay bow[ing] politely to the ladies and then going to [his] cabin.

"There's no need to stay up," Sincl[air] assured the spinsters who were still so[b]bing together. "Nothing more's going t[o] happen now. Captain Brandon has every[-]thing under control and he doesn't want to question anybody again. You'd better try and get some sleep."

"Sleep?" exclaimed one of them indignantly, blowing her nose. "How can anyone sleep on this terrible ship?"

Sinclair sighed and the two women disappeared and locked themselves in. Then he looked at Aline Henderson and Mrs. Soult.

"What was the sense of hauling those

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women out of bed?" he said plaintively. Aline Henderson looked at him and shook her head.

"I don't know," she said wearily. "I think they were roused by the shot and when Captain Brandon came into the saloon he told everyone to remain here."

"And you—er—were here too?"

"I was in my room."

He nodded.

"You're very quiet, Mrs. Soult," he suggested at last. She looked up at him and smoothed back her hair.

"I'm frightfully nervous," she whispered. "I think I'll try and sleep though, if you'll excuse me."

She left hurriedly before anything further could be said and Sinclair settled himself comfortably in his chair. Aline Henderson moved uncertainly towards the door of her own room and then stopped abruptly at Sinclair's next words.

"Tell me," he said absently, "where were you on the bridge when Prescott was killed? Was it you he shot at instead of Sintang?"

She stared at him for a long moment and then slowly nodded.

"I—I followed Prescott up there. I didn't know that Sintang was following both of us. Prescott had just opened the [redacted] when he heard me. I didn't intend to try and stop him or anything. I just wanted to know what—what he was doing. But I stumbled over the rubber mat on the deck and almost fell through the cabin doorway. Prescott turned around and fired. And just as quickly someone—Sintang—pushed me aside and threw—threw that knife. That's all. He told me to say nothing."

Sinclair regarded her with a tolerant smile.

"Just like that, eh? I wondered how Prescott came to miss. In the morning, Miss Henderson, and it won't be long before dawn now, I think you and I are going to get down to facts. There's too much mystery."

SHE bit her lip, made some remark under her breath which he did not catch, and then went on into her room. She was, he could see, very nearly exhausted. He shrugged, finished his drink and poured another, and he was just lifting the glass to his lips when the second mate burst storming into the saloon.

"I've been looking for you," he said breathless. "Just been on the bridge where I left you. The wireless operator——"

"Dead or slugged?" asked Sinclair quickly, sitting bolt upright. "I was afraid of that. I warned him to look out."

"Slugged. Looks like a blackjack was used. I've got the doctor up there with him and he says he'll be unconscious for hours, maybe days. Concussion, he thinks."

"So you didn't get the wireless message off that Captain Brandon wrote for you? I wondered why Donatello was so agreeable about it."

"No, I didn't get it off," agreed the second mate. "And that's a hell of a business. The operator was the only man on board who could work the instrument."

"Except me," Sinclair corrected him. "Yes, except me. I studied operating years ago. Let's see if it's possible to get word through to the mainland. Things are distinctly out of hand."

He rose and straightened, yawning, and then suddenly he grew rigid and stared at the saloon doorway. Donatello stood there, his eyes glittering, the cold smile on his lips and in each hand an unwavering automatic. Behind him Sinclair could see he had other men.

"All right, Sinclair," rasped Donatello. "The party's over and we've quit holding hands. You're getting to be a nuisance."

"What in hell's the meaning of this?" roared the second mate. "You can't do that sort of thing on board here. Holding people up."

"Shut it, punk!" rapped the other. "Frisk 'em, boys, and pitch 'em in Sinclair's room."

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SINCLAIR said nothing. Four or five hard-faced men shouldered into the saloon. They were all armed and it was quite obvious now that seafaring was hardly their profession. The second mate gave a bull-like roar and started to fight, but a crack over the head with the flat of a gun subdued him and he was dragged half-stunned to Sinclair's room and tossed inside. Sinclair submitted to search without a whimper, requested if he might take his bottle of whiskey with him, and obediently entered his room on his own two feet, handing Donatello his key and carefully closing the door.

Donatello locked it and tossed the key in the air, catching it with a quick hand and a light laugh.

"It's a cinch, fellows. One of you sit around here and watch. There'll be no more pussyfooting. We'll have control of the ship in about ten minutes and I guess everything's going to be O. K."

"The skipper know anything about this, boss?" one of them inquired. Donatello grinned.

"Not yet. He's getting cold feet and we'll handle things our own way now. We'll need him for a while maybe and after that——" They all laughed.

Aline Henderson's door opened and she looked out.

"I thought I heard a noise," she began. "Someone fighting——" Then she caught sight of the guns and her eyes grew big. "Oh," she said. "What is it now?"

"Nothing to be afraid of, lady," Donatello assured her, grinning, and somewhat relieved the other women were not aroused. "Just a little shaking down. You get your beauty sleep and we'll talk in the morning. I wouldn't be surprised if we didn't become very good friends."

Aline Henderson shut her door hard and sat down to think. She had had several delicate and even dangerous commissions thrust upon her in the past, but never one quite so complicated as this. It frightened her. Donatello jerked his head towards Sintang's door.

"Watch the nigger too, boys. If he comes out frisk him and get his key and lock him back in. But you'd better watch your step. He's dangerous."

WHEN the dawn broke the *Island Queen* was completely in the hands of Donatello and his men. The chief engineer, the chief steward, the second and third mates and the male passengers were all locked away. The surgeon was shut in the little hospital aft with the unconscious wireless operator. Fully two dozen armed men patrolled the decks and the engineroom, effectively checking any curiosity on the part of the other members of the crew who were mystified and uneasy as to what it was all about. The majority of the engineers, being Donatello's men shipped in Singapore, handled the vessel below, while on the bridge Captain Brandon fumed and sweated and shook in a panic.

"I tell you you're going too far, Donatello," he swore. "Taking over my ship like this. I was handling things all right."

"Yeah, you were handling things all right," sneered the Italian. "Getting in over your head. Besides, why worry now? This saves a lot of blarneying. We'd have had to take over anyway when we reached the coast."

"I don't like it," muttered Captain Brandon, wiping his forehead. "I've got to handle the ship alone now."

"What of it? According to your own figures it's only a matter of twenty hours or so before we connect with my outfit. You can stand a watch that long. At least," he added callously, "you'd better."

Captain Brandon stared at him with red-rimmed frightened eyes and flicked an involuntary glance at the side pockets of the Italian's jacket where there were ominous bulges.

"Yes, of course," he gulped. "I'll stand it. But no more killings."

"There won't be," said Donatello easily. "Not if everyone behaves. Get into the chartroom and take a shot. You're shak-

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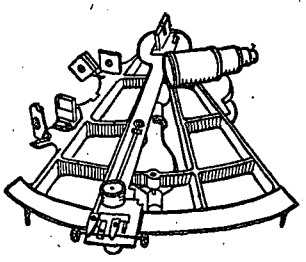
ing yourself to pieces. If you hadn't smeared Barnes when you did everything would have gone smooth."

"What was I to do?" the captain protested. "He was going to give everything away."

"You should have come to me," said Donatello savagely. "I'd have handled things better. Anyway, it's no account now."

They left the bridge and went into the chartroom. Mrs. Soult was pacing up and down the room, twisting her handkerchief nervously, her eyes mirrored by dark



shadows. She halted at the sight of the two men and sank to the settee without a word. Captain Brandon cursed and brought a bottle of whiskey from a locker, produced glasses and poured.

"Want one?" he snarled at the woman. She nodded quickly and he thrust a glass into her hand. "To tell you the truth, Donatello," he went on hurriedly, "it was that damned Sinclair who had me worried more than anything. Prying around. Snooping. Asking questions. Eileen—Mrs. Soult—told me he tried to get more information out of her last night. Wanted to know who it was she'd heard outside her cabin when Barnes was—er—hurt."

"Well, didn't she hear?" asked Donatello brutally. He drank. "She's got the goods on you, eh, Skipper? Then why don't you smear her too?"

Mrs. Soult got up with a stifled cry, her face white. Captain Brandon turned on the Italian with a snarl. "You shut up! She's going with me."

Donatello shrugged.

"That's your funeral. But women are poison—if they know too much. I'm telling you."

"I'll handle this situation," the captain muttered and tossed down another stiff whiskey. He stared at the chart and made rapid calculations. "We ought to sight your friend's boat about dark."

"Correct," agreed Donatello. "And she can escort us in. Just in case of trouble. It's a cinch." He laughed a little, without mirth, and left them. Mrs. Soult caught the captain's arm in a frightened grip.

"Arnold! I'm afraid of that man. Wanting you to—to kill me."

He kissed her roughly and then pushed her away, repressing his own anger and fear.

"Forget it. His mind runs that way, that's all. Just a damned gangster getting into something out of his line. You and I are going to have a whale of a time in Mexico City. And after that Paris, eh? Or Buenos Aires. Just keep thinking of that."

"Yes," she nodded and tried to smile. "But Donatello? Do you think he'll keep his share of the bargain? The men are all his. And you know his kind."

THE idea brought a stifled oath to Captain Brandon's lips and fear came to his eyes. He had dimly speculated on the possibility but not too seriously. He had always comforted himself with the thought that he was master of the ship, needed at least to handle her. The woman made him uneasy.

"You mean," he muttered hesitantly, "he might leave us out—leave us behind. Or else——"

She met his eyes and nodded, frightened, wetting her lips, all her old boldness gone. Captain Brandon wiped his forehead on the sleeve of his jacket and poured another drink.

"The devil," he muttered. "He'd do it too, if he felt like it. I should have stuck all my own men in the crew."

Mrs. Soult hesitated and then set down her glass.

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"Arnold," she said hoarsely, "I *know* he means to get rid of you. Last night when he and some of his men took Mr. Sinclair and the second mate in the saloon, I listened behind my door. I heard Donatello say he'd need you for a while maybe and after that—— I guessed what he meant."

Captain Brandon's florid face went gray.

"You're sure? He's figuring that way already?"

"I know it."

"The devil!" the captain exploded. "I might have known." He wiped his forehead again. "That makes it a hell of a mess, and we've got to figure a way out. Two can play the double-cross as well as one. Hell, I'm master still."

"Yeah?" drawled a sarcastic voice from the doorway. Captain Brandon and Mrs. Soult both whipped around and choked. Donatello stood there, smiling thinly, an automatic in one hand.

"I thought I might hear something interesting if I stuck around," he sneered. "So I did. Your voices carried quite good."

Captain Brandon loosened his collar and stammered.

"I—I thought you'd gone below."

"Too bad," Donatello mused. "I was just hiding around the back of the house here. Just a damned gangster, am I? And so you're in a hell of a mess and you've got to figure a way out, eh? Well, it's all figured."

There was no mistaking the look that came over his face now and Mrs. Soult screamed.

"Figured on crossing me, eh?" the Italian said and the automatic roared twice. Captain Brandon put one hand uncertainly to his heart and with a surprised look on his face fell slowly forward. Donatello blew the smoke from the automatic muzzle and laughed.

"I don't really need you, skipper," he drawled. "I've got two more officers who can handle ship safely locked away below. One of 'em will listen to reason."

"You—you murderer!" Mrs. Soult gasped. She was pale as a ghost and swaying.

"Yeah?" the other snarled. "Well, you watch your step too, sister. Any funny business and you get the works as well. Brandon was cracking anyway."

He shrugged, turned abruptly and went down on the main deck. Mrs. Soult made a last desperate effort to control herself and then pitched forward in a dead faint.

CHAPTER V

ON THE BRIDGE

SINCLAIR was perched on the edge of his bunk. The second mate sat on the settee and nursed an aching head, groaning every once in a while.

"Never argue with a gun, my boy," said Sinclair amiably. "In fact, never argue at all. It saves a lot of trouble."

"I've made some crazy voyages," groaned the second mate, "but this is the worst. What can we do?"

"For the time being," said Sinclair, "nothing. Later, when it gets dark again—if we have that much time—we'll see. I fancy I can pick the lock all right. But the guard in the saloon will be a problem unless we're careful."

"We've got to get the ship back," insisted the second mate. "We'll never have a chance if they meet their own craft first or get to the coast."

"Ah, yes," Sinclair observed. "That's one thing that's been bothering me. Why do they want to get to the coast? Why take the trouble to dock the ship there? Why not just have their own craft meet us at sea anyway, loot the jewels and run?" An idea occurred to him. "Have we a valuable cargo on board, Manning?"

"So-so. Mostly machinery. I don't know exactly what. Consigned from Brietman & Sons of Singapore to an outfit in Frisco."

"Ah," Sinclair breathed. "Brietman & Sons, eh? I think I begin to smell the inevitable rat."

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"Rat?" echoed the second mate, looking up.

"Yes, the rat," Sinclair agreed. "Do you know what Brietman & Sons specialize in, apart from general cargoes?"

"No, what?"

"Guns. Ammunition. German armaments as a whole. I'd make a modest bet that it's funny sort of machinery you've got below."

"You think we're carrying contraband?"

"Why not? Why else run the *Island Queen* to Mexico? Otherwise it doesn't make sense. The affair becomes complicated, you see. The Raja of Balok's jewels and a cargo of contraband. No wonder Captain Brandon fell. Two fortunes to collect instead of one."

The second mate looked blank.

"But—but how was it managed? I'm sure the owner knows nothing about it."

"Probably not. Or rather certainly not. Brant Harris doesn't go in for crime. Someone—perhaps Donatello—was sent East arranging matters and found out that Captain Brandon was in financial trouble. The set-up would be perfect if the ship's master could be won over. Load ostensible machinery for Frisco and then divert the ship. Come to think of it, the chances are Donatello knew nothing of the jewels until after making a deal with Captain Brandon. Maybe Brandon mentioned them and suggested going the whole hog. I suspect if there is contraband below the original idea was for Brandon to get a pay-off and then to get into Frisco with a report of being held by gangsters in the crew who compelled him to turn aside. The jewels though must have got under his skin and he and Donatello figured to land the contraband, grab the jewels, abandon the ship and beat it. There's a lot of angles."

"But what about Prescott?"

"Prescott," mused Sinclair, "or rather Souter, was playing a lone hand, for the jewels alone. He must have had an accomplice though at that. How did he get the safe combination? Well, I think I know but the answer can wait. The main trouble is with us, stuck in here."

"The main trouble is with my head," groaned the second mate.

THEY discussed the situation from every angle all through that day while the *Island Queen* snored across a calm, warm sea with a summer sun above. At noon two of Donatello's men unlocked the cabin door and brought plates of food for them, one man holding a gun on the prisoners while the other set the dishes on the settee. The second mate had no appetite but Sinclair ate with zest.

"Better keep up your strength," he declared cheerfully. "You'll need it later. I'm getting ideas."

After he had eaten Sinclair opened his trunk and secured a tight roll of green baize which, when opened, disclosed a most amazing array of strong but delicate instruments.

"My burglar outfit," he explained amiably. "Comes in handy sometimes."

"I don't see what we can do even if we do get out and overpower the guards," grumbled the second mate. "God only knows how many men Donatello's got."

"I wonder," said Sinclair absently, "What's become of Miss Henderson and Mrs. Soult. There're possibilities in both."

He discovered about Aline Henderson a few hours later, just after dusk had settled upon the sea and the loom of the Mexican coast was edging the horizon to starboard. A heavy but small, compact package suddenly hurtled through the open cabin port, almost hitting the second mate, and thudded to the deck.

"Well," said Sinclair. "Someone's remembering us."

The second mate handed him the package and he opened it. First there was a note, then a small automatic, and finally a bunch of keys on a ring. The note, hurriedly written, read:

This is the only way I can think of to help though I have to be careful and wait

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for a moment when I am not watched. They are not keeping us women shut in. I suppose they think we are harmless, but someone always follows us wherever we go. Donatello and Captain Brandon had an argument early this morning and Donatello killed him. The keys are the captain's master bunch and one of them should open your door. Mrs. Soult got them for me and she is convinced that none of us will be left alive to give any evidence after the ship reaches her destination. I understand we are expected to meet Donatello's friends in their boat at about eleven o'clock. At ten o'clock I will try and take care of the saloon guard and any others I can manage. The third officer is in charge of the bridge. Donatello threatened to kill him unless he took the ship where he wanted it. One guard is up there to watch the third. The gun is the only one I have or can obtain. Good luck, and I'll be waiting in my room. The chief engineer, chief steward and surgeon are all captives. I think Donatello has about fifteen of his own men on board.

Aline Henderson.

"Now that," said Sinclair amiably, "is what I call a smart girl." He rubbed his hands. "Excellent," he said. "Excellent, my dear Manning."

"Captain Brandon gone too," muttered the second mate. "My God, who next?"

"I suspect," said Sinclair amiably, "it should be Donatello. I don't like him at all."

AFTER dark, and a painful waiting during which he did his best with a whiskey bottle, at exactly ten minutes past ten Sinclair carefully slid one of the captain's master keys into the cabin door and as carefully opened it. He expected a gunblast, or at least a rough order to get back where he belonged, but to his surprise he saw the limp figure of the guard huddled in a chair and snoring lustily. He opened the door wider and stepped into the saloon, the second mate at his heels. And the second mate gasped.

"He's out," he said unnecessarily. "Or asleep."

"Out," agreed Sinclair, crossing to the huddled guard and cautiously prying open one eyelid. "I think Miss Henderson must be a cleverer lady than ever we supposed."

He moved to the door of Aline Henderson's room and tapped softly. She appeared without hesitation, dressed in a dark tailored suit, with a tight-fitting hat pulled close over her hair and her face determined. She glanced at the guard and then at Sinclair, smiling tensely.

"I used laudanum," she whispered. "In the pantry coffee urn. I don't know how many drank it, but I was certain the guard would."

"Fine," said Sinclair. "Where's Donatello?"

"On the bridge, I think. He's expecting his ship any minute."

"Check," said Sinclair. "Come on."

"But she shouldn't get mixed up in this," protested the second mate. "There may be a fight."

"Try and keep me out of it," snapped the girl indignantly. "This is my party as well as yours."

Sinclair nodded without comment and led the way. In the pantry, as they passed

the door, they saw the night steward in a huddle in one corner, sleeping peacefully, and out on the dark main deck, seated on the steampipe casing and slumped back against the saloon house bulkhead, they found another man who had quite evidently taken coffee too. He had a gun and Sinclair slipped this to the second mate.

There seemed little life along the deck.

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From the direction of the fiddley they caught a gust of muffled curses vented on some unfortunate, perhaps one of the regular crew who had come up for a breather from the hot stokehold. But for'ard the ship was quiet and on the bridge there was only the quiet sound of the officer pacing back and forth. Sinclair went up the companion followed by the others.

The captain's rooms were brightly lighted and the ports open, and peering carefully into one of them Sinclair saw two men kneeling before the ship's safe. One of them was working patiently at the tumblers and the other was swearing with impatience.

"Donatello," murmured Sinclair, "and a friend. It seems they didn't find the safe combination among the lamented skipper's effects then. He probably carried it in his head or hid it too well. That gives us something of a break. Now for the upper bridge. Time's short."

THEY went up through the darkness without a sound and Sinclair cautiously lifted his head above the upper step, growing rigid as the dim legs of a man paced past him to the bridge wing and then turned and paced back. Against the faint starlight he caught the outline of a peaked cap and guessed it was the third mate. He waited until the officer returned again and then gave a distinct hiss. The third mate stopped short, looked vaguely upwards, then out ahead, and as Sinclair cautiously tugged at his pants stared blankly down.

"Hold it, Lafferty. This is Sinclair. Can you hear me?"

The third mate reacted admirably. He stooped as if to tie his shoe.

"Good God, how did you get out?" he muttered. "I wasn't even sure you hadn't been killed."

"Never mind that. Where's your guard?"

"Sitting on the lifebelt box and smoking. Near the wheelhouse."

"Go and talk to him. I'll handle the rest. Who's at the wheel? One of Donatello's men?"

"No," said the third mate scornfully. "They seem to have the course they want to hold down by heart, and they seem able to read the compass after a fashion, but none of them can steer. Watson's at the wheel and he's O. K. He's sailed with us before."

"Fine," said Sinclair. "Get busy now. Time's damned short."

The third mate grunted, straightened, paced back to where his guard sat, and after a moment or so Sinclair caught their two voices raised in some argument. He touched the second mate behind him with his heel as a signal and slowly crawled up on the bridge.

He located the guard immediately by the glow of his cigarette, and remaining almost flat on the bridge deck he inched along until he was hidden behind the wheelhouse bulkhead. Then he got to his feet and ran lightly right round the house. There was no time nor any opportunity to make a specific plan. The second mate and the girl would have to act as seemed best. He rather hoped they would keep still and leave things to him.

He came up behind the unsuspecting guard and then at the last moment, just as he was raising his automatic to strike, he stumbled over the lanyards of the lifebelt box and barely suppressed an involuntary oath. The guard heaved up and turned, quick as a snake, his hand going to his gun. Sinclair struck and missed, almost falling over, but the third mate with the pent up rage of a man who has been knocked about and humiliated, swung a heavy fist. There was a dull crack and the guard staggered. Sinclair concentrated on the man's gun. If that went off and the alarm given it was likely the whole effort was thrown away.

HE CLAMPED on the guard's wrist and twisted, one thumb jammed against the gun's hammer, and then the third mate struck again. The guard let

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go of the gun and went to his knees, and Sinclair finished him with a vicious rap over the temple.

"Close," he muttered savagely, flicking sweat from his forehead. "Tie him up and gag him, Lafferty. We've got the bridge anyway if that's anything."

The second mate loomed close, with the girl at his shoulder.

"Now what?" he demanded.

"The course," said Sinclair impatiently. "Donatello's ship must be near. Get off the course and head anywhere else you like. Douse the navigation lights. It's a chance the lookouts won't notice them for a while."

"There's a man in the crow's-nest and two on the fo'c's'le-head," observed the third mate, taking a last frapping turn on the unconscious guard's bonds. "But you're probably right. They won't notice anything wrong. They're not sailors."

The second mate was already peering over the startled helmsman's shoulder at the compass giving orders in a low voice. Insensibly the *Island Queen* began to swing. In ten minutes she was steaming full ahead at right angles to her former course, heading for the open sea.

"All right so far," said Sinclair. "Now you three keep the bridge and stay up here. If Donatello and his brother thug working on the ship's safe decide to make a visit entertain them. Quietly if possible. I'm going midships."

"You can't do anything alone," protested the second mate. Sinclair rubbed his nose vigorously with the muzzle of his gun.

"I *do* need a drink," he admitted humorously. "But we'll see."

Aline Henderson caught his arm.

"Don't—don't go down there. We can all make a stand on the bridge. It's better—if they catch you——"

He looked at her intently in the darkness and patted her hand. "Don't worry, dear lady. I've a really amazing faculty for not getting hurt. And I've got a job to do." He sighed and pressed her fingers, half in earnest. "If I wasn't such an old man——"

"Oh, don't," she said passionately. "You know I never think that. Be sensible."

He gently released her hand and without another word padded silently for the companion. The second mate bent a little and spoke into Aline Henderson's ear.

"You think quite a lot of him, don't you?"

The girl relaxed a little and turned.

"Perhaps," she said noncommittally. "I've never met anyone quite like him."

"Nor me," mused the second mate. "At first you think he's just a fat, pink little drunk——"

"Is that necessary?" said the girl icily.

"And then," went on the mate, grinning to himself, "when you get to know him he's a foxy bunch of dynamite. I know. Why, in the Australian Bight one time—but never mind!"

"Tell me," said Aline Henderson imperiously. "I *knew* he must have a reputation." And there being nothing else to do for a while but wait the second mate told her.

SINCLAIR was never a fool. He knew quite well that one able man prowling loose on a ship's deck at night could frequently do more against enemies than half a dozen stalwarts. Apart from this someone had to hold the bridge and endeavor to keep the ship on her new course. Nor was that alone sufficient. Help of some kind had to be obtained.

He padded softly by the saloon doorway, stopped a moment to inspect the slumbering gangster on the steampipe casing, and then went on aft. He had looked into the captain's port on coming down from the bridge, to discover Donatello and his companion still working at the ship's safe. For a moment, he had debated the matter of breaking in on them but decided finally that one thing at least was more important.

He went up on the boat deck, after slipping by two armed men who were talking in low tones in the galley, and approaching the darkened wireless shack he cautiously entered.

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"If Donatello busted the set besides slugging the operator then I'm sunk," he muttered, and switched on his flashlamp. He breathed a sigh of relief to find the set intact. Donatello had, of course, been quite certain from what he must have learned from Captain Brandon that the operator was the only man on board who could send messages. That would explain why he hadn't bothered to put the set out of commission. Perhaps he had even figured on using it again when the operator came to. Not that it mattered now, Sinclair considered.

He was worried a little about the noise, the zip and crackle the set would give, but that was a chance, another chance he had to take. He carefully closed and screwed shut the wireless shack's ports, dropping the glass and the deadlights. The door he bolted. That done he switched on the electric lights and seated himself at the operator's table. It had been some time since he had done this sort of thing, and there were a few gadgets in the set that were new to him, but he soon figured them out. And for half an hour thereafter he was intent upon his task, his face running with perspiration in the confined airless room. But when he rose at last, with a sigh and a stretching of his plump body, he was smiling amiably and with full satisfaction.

He left the wireless shack as silently as he had entered it and was somewhat relieved to find that no one apparently had noticed his activities. Of course the normal sea noises, the wind, and the engine thump would obscure most of the wireless sound, but you never could tell. He dropped to the main deck, flattened down in the scuppers against the rail while a guard passed, yawning cavernously and evidently patrolling, and slipping by the engine-room thwartship alleyway, where two more guards leaned on the rail and stared down at the belting machinery, he reached the door of the chief's room. The fourth key of the captain's master ring that he tried let him in and from the pitch darkness the chief engineer's voice demanded a startled, "Who in hell's that?"

"Quiet," warned Sinclair. He slid on his flash-lamp, let the light shine on his own face and then on that of the open-mouthed chief's sitting up in his bunk. Without other words he closed all the ports and deadlights and switched on the overhead globes.

"Sinclair," said the mystified chief. "I thought you were under lock and key same as me. How——?"

"Where's the whiskey?" said Sinclair patiently. The chief pointed to a locker and while Sinclair made a dive for it he hastily pulled on his shoes.

"That's better," said Sinclair, smacking his lips. "Now listen, chief. We're in a mess."

"You're telling me," choked the chief bitterly. "Me locked in and my engine-room under control of a lot of thugs. Some of them my own engineers too. Damn 'em. I might have known when the old timers didn't turn up in Singapore that something was wrong. And who'd have thought that wop Donatello and Captain Brandon were in cahoots? My stars——"

"Keep still and listen," said Sinclair impatiently. "Time's short." He explained the position to the chief and then inquired, "Who do you think we can trust, if we can get at them and let them loose? The main and immediate thing is if we can hold the bridge long enough we might be able to escape from this ship Donatello's sent for."

"Unless," the chief reminded him, "they get wise and stop the engines. You don't think we could get the whole ship back by force?"

Sinclair was doubtful.

"Maybe," he said. "But we can't arm our men."

"Well," ruminated the chief. "There's the chief steward I know is sound. And I suppose some of my stokehold crowd and the deck crowd are O. K. But how are we going to find out who's who and get at them?"

"You *would* suggest that," grumbled

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Sinclair. He tilted the bottle and drank again. "Oh, well. Let's you and me be getting back to the bridge. Unless I'm badly mistaken things will be settled one way or the other by dawn anyway. Got a gun?"

"I had one," swore the chief. "Started carrying it after Barnes was murdered. But they lifted it when they locked me in here."

"Never mind. There's lots of chances to pick one up."

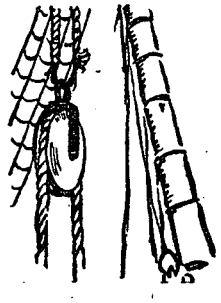
He turned off the light, opened the cabin door and after a short silent wait slipped outside, the chief at his heels. He pulled the chief over to the rail and forced him bending to the scuppers.

"If we flattened against the bulkhead he'd likely run into us," he said. "As it is I've discovered it's safer to get close to the rail. He'll likely take us for a couple of pump openings or a pair of bitts, if he sees us at all."

"Who?" demanded the mystified chief.

"The guard. One of the guards on patrol," Sinclair explained impatiently. "He'll be around soon, and you need a gun."

They waited quietly until the firm pad of shoes came to them and the guard appeared languidly strolling round the corner



of the house. He was smoking a cigarette and was gazing dreamily out over the sea. He probably never knew what hit him. Sinclair rapped him smartly on the back of the head as the chief grabbed his ankles and jerked. Then the chief took the falling body on his shoulder and eased it to the deck, while Sinclair unbuckled the guard's cartridge belt and handed it over.

"But don't let fly unless it's absolutely necessary," he warned. "If we could dispose of all of them as easily as this things would be simple."

"I'm annoyed," stated the chief as they stood up. "I've been chief engineer for upwards of twelve years now and this is the first time I've had to crawl around on my own ship. Let's go."

THEY navigated their way to the saloon without mishap and Sinclair was already making for the companion to the bridge when two men came to view walking from the foredeck.

"That you, Clint?" one of them hailed as he approached. Sinclair swore and fingered his trigger. Then the dazzle of a flash-lamp blinded him and he heard an astonished oath.

"Geez, it's that fat guy! Let him have it!"

Sinclair dropped flat and fired as vicious lead bit at the bulkhead above him and ricocheted off. The chief engineer gave an oath as a bullet clipped his arm and forgetting he held a gun he ran forward like a charging bull. The flashlamp winked out and Sinclair tried to see what was going on in the ensuing blackness. The firing stopped. One man was on his knees on the deck, groaning and holding his shoulder. The other was locked in snarling, vicious combat with the chief engineer. They broke at last and the gangster backed. The chief suddenly seemed to remember he had a gun for he blazed away blindly. The gangster staggered and shot back, then staggered again and fell. Sinclair grabbed the chief's arm and forcibly hauled him away.

"On the bridge!" he snapped authoritatively. "Quick now. All hell's going to break loose."

The cursing, angry but triumphant chief allowed himself to be all but hurled up the companion. The affair had taken place in less than half a minute, but already men were shouting and running along the decks.

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On the lower bridge the door of Captain Brandon's room crashed back and Donatello appeared gun in hand just as Sinclair and the chief came to view.

"What in hell's going on?" Donatello demanded wrathfully. "What's all the blasting for? I'll——" And then he recognized Sinclair and lifted his automatic. Sinclair fired twice and Donatello bit out a livid oath as the lead caught the fleshy part of his left arm. He emptied his gun, half-blind because he had come from the lighted cabin and the lower bridge was filled with shadows beyond the shaft of glare from the open door. Sinclair gasped and nursed a hole through his left wrist as he pounded to the upper bridge. He thought for a moment the chief engineer was too badly hurt to follow but he appeared a moment later, backing up and firing down at an angle into the captain's doorway through which Donatello had ducked after being wounded.

ON THE bridge all was excitement, the second and third mates and Aline Henderson full of questions and holding ready guns. Sinclair took charge quite calmly and as by right.

"Lafferty, you watch the port companion. You, Manning, the starboard. Shoot to kill. We hold the bridge or we're finished. Get it? Chief, you watch the after bridge end, will you? They might try a climb over the rail. I'll handle things this side."

"What have you been up to?" Aline Henderson demanded furiously. "I was scared stiff while you were gone. First just a long silence, and then suddenly all that shooting. What was it? How did you find the chief?"

"Come in the chartroom and I'll tell you," said Sinclair grimly. He led the way and switched on the lights. The girl stared wide-eyed at his blood-drenched limp wrist and hand and went pale.

"But you're hurt!" she gasped. "Is it bad?"

"Anything that hurts is always bad," Sinclair grunted. "Find something to use for a bandage, will you?"

She looked around desperately and seeing nothing handy quite deliberately lifted her dress and using the chartroom scissors slashed cloth from her slip. She brought the water carafe from its bulkhead rack to the chart table then and reached for Sinclair's arm. He was white and shaking a little but his eyes had not lost their humor.

"Tut, tut!" he admonished. "You ought to be able to handle a temporary job anyway. I don't think any bone's busted. In an hour or so I won't need bandaging because I'll either be dead or with a real doctor."

"What do you mean?" she demanded hotly, washing the blood away. "You know I'm a nurse."

"If you're a nurse then I'm a hairdresser," observed Sinclair amiably. She stopped short at that and stared at him.

"What do you think I am then?"

"Skip it," said Sinclair. "We'll take it up later. In the meantime get busy. I'm needed on the bridge."

She finished a rough bandage job in silence, her face pale and angry at his abruptness, and then they went out on the bridge again. The captain's room below was in darkness now, Donatello having switched off the lights so he would present no target, but the lights were blazing in the saloon and midships along the main deck and men were talking excitedly, Donatello's savage voice dominating everything.

"Now we get it hot," Sinclair stated to the second mate. "They're jumpy and they'll try and rush the bridge."

"What a chance," jeered the second mate. "That'll be suicide."

"Unless I miss a guess," Sinclair amended, "it'll be hell. Donatello will have provided for emergencies."

Donatello had. He silenced his followers, shook away the man who had just bandaged his arm, and shouted up at the bridge.

"Sinclair! I guess you're running things up there. I don't know how you got the break and I don't give a damn. But I'm

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willing to make a deal. Suppose we cut you and the rest in? Give us a hand to make the coast and we'll call you partners."

"That," answered Sinclair, "would be something."

"You're smart, eh?" Donatello sneered. "I know damned well you've changed the course. I spotted the skipper's tell-tale before I left his room. But you're just a sap. Don't you know I've got friends coming out to meet me any minute now."

"Of course," Sinclair assured him. "And so have I."

"You have what?"

"Friends coming to meet me."

"Bluffing, eh?"

"Not at all." Sinclair was careful to keep himself in the blackness and away from the navigation bridge rail. Even on a dark night a head looms big enough for a shot. "Not at all. I never bluff. I sent out a wireless a while back and was lucky enough to make contact with the United States destroyer *Arrowhead*. I hadn't hoped for such luck. I trust you believe me, Donatello. I was trying for San Diego but lo and behold I got the *Arrowhead*. She's down in our vicinity looking for a missing tuna fisher. She ought to be here any time."

"You can't tell me that," Donatello sneered. "Cut it. I'm giving you a last chance. Do you give over the bridge or do we take it?"

"You might try," Sinclair suggested and then said hurriedly to his companions, "Duck! He's not bluffing."

DONATELLO wasn't. He roared out some orders and after a brief pause there broke suddenly forth the vicious chatter of a tommy gun, spraying along the bridge and slapping the woodwork outside the after rails to splinters. The chief engineer let out an oath as he was hit in the fleshy part of one calf. The unfortunate guard, bound and gagged near the lifebelt box, was riddled. Sinclair and the others took refuge in the bridge center, for'ard of the wheel house where the tommy slugs could not reach.

"Watch the companions," Sinclair warned thinly. "They'll try and rush under cover of the gun. But we ought to be able to pick 'em off as they come."

They were able to. The tommy gun centered for a while on the head of each companion then stopped. There was a rush of heavy shoes and dark figures burst up. Sinclair got on one knee and chuckled. Dark as it was, a blind man could hardly miss at such short range. He dropped two men who appeared up the companion he was covering, and the second mate got another on the opposite side of the deck. The attack dribbled away and they could hear Donatello's vicious cursing.

"All right, damn you," he raved. "You might have the wheel, but I've still got the engineroom. And, by God, I'll disconnect the steering gear and we'll use the back wheel to control the ship."

"Damn," choked the second mate. "He seems to know ships."

"You mean his pals in the crew must have given him the dope," snapped Sinclair. "Well, all we can do is wait. Where's the signal rockets? It'll take them an hour anyway to get the after wheel fixed."

"Rockets?" said the second mate, puzzled. "Why, they're in the lower drawer in the chartroom. Why?"

"Send one up every two minutes," Sinclair ordered. "The *Arrowhead* must be coming up fast."

"What about Donatello's ship? She's close too. If we rocket she'll spot us."

"That," Sinclair agreed grimly, "is something we must chance. If we can hang on long enough the *Arrowhead* will be here."

Aline Henderson touched his arm.

"Are you sure about the *Arrowhead?* You're not just saying that to—to help."

"Dear lady," Sinclair assured her, patting her hand, "I never just say things. I mean them. By the way, where's Mrs. Soult?"

"Sick the last time I looked into her

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room. Nervous breakdown I think. She's been through a lot."

"She deserves it," Sinclair grunted. "But she's had a lesson and if we get out of this I'll go easy on her. I wonder what's happened to Sintang? I should have let him out when we were in the saloon."

Almost as if in answer to his remark there came a hoarse cry from the main deck, followed by a choked scream and an oath, and then Donatello shouted, "Stop him! Stop him, you damned fools!" There was a flurry of excited revolver shots and a dark figure slid agilely over the bridge's after rail, was almost brained by the startled chief engineer's swinging gun, and finally appeared panting before Sinclair.

"I was delayed," breathed Sintang's voice. "The lock of my door was obstinate. But I am here, as you see."

"I was just wondering," Sinclair told him. "I take it you had to sock someone on the way up. That scream——"

"He got in my way," explained the Malay simply. "But I happened to have

another kris." He laughed softly and held up a wavy-edged blade. Aline Henderson shuddered and put her hands over her eyes for a moment.

"Good man," said Sinclair approvingly. "You'd better go and stand by the chief engineer. Sorry we haven't a spare gun."

"No matter," observed Sintang as he obediently moved away. "A man can only die once."

"Every recruit's welcome," said Sinclair. "Sintang's a good man," he added to the girl. She nodded quickly.

"Of course. I only hope he lives through all this. I don't expect to." She was shaking.

"Care to bet, dear lady?" Sinclair challenged her, and when she shook her head he did a very strange thing. He put one arm about her and kissed her, and then turning abruptly walked away.

Viciously and somewhat futilely the tommy gun sprayed again, this time from the boatdeck so that it all but dominated the entire bridge. The helmsman dropped with a choked scream and the third mate, crawling on his stomach, got to the wheel and steered kneeling, with only an occasional straightening up to look at the compass, holding the *Island Queen's* bow notched on a group of stars.

"I only hope," breathed Sinclair, "it doesn't occur to any of our opponents to take a tommy gun up into the crow's nest. One there and we'd be wiped out in a matter of minutes."

Fortunately the idea seemed to occur to none of the gangsters and after a while the firing dribbled away again.

"All right," Donatello shouted. "We'll stop the engine. My boat'll find us all right."

WITH a hiss and a splutter the first rocket zipped up from the bridge and broke in stars and splendor against the night sky, and the momentary light occasioned a new burst of firing. Sinclair emptied his gun at a huddle of figures on the boat deck and was certain he had winged at least one. Down below in their cabin the two spinsters were screaming hysterically; for'ard the loyal members of the crew were sullenly eyeing the two armed men who kept them from breaking from the fo'c's'le. Another rocket zipped upwards. Donatello shouted a last desperate offer at the bridge and then led men aft to disconnect the steering gear, deciding that it was better to have full control of the ship's direction, to set her back on her old course, than it was to stop the engine and wait for his friends to find him.

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In many ways he was furious at himself, not only for not locking up all the women as well as the men passengers—he had finally deduced what had happened to his saloon guard—but because he had slugged the wireless operator too hard. If the operator were conscious he would be able to send word to the racing vessel on which Donatello's friends were coming, probably as it was shooting to the south of the *Island Queen* and figuring her still on the earlier reported course.

"More rockets?" inquired the second mate.

"Keep them up," Sinclair admonished him. "It's about our only chance."

He swore suddenly then for far astern of the *Island Queen* an answering rocket broke against the sky.

"That's Donatello's boys for a bet," he said bitterly. "I was afraid of that. They're either answering on general sea principles or guess Donatello's in trouble. But keep the rockets going. The *Arrowhead*'s somewhere around. Damn it, it's got to be!"

CHAPTER VI

SPECIAL MARINE INVESTIGATOR

AN HOUR later Sinclair would not have given a dime for his chances. Out of the night and over the velvet sea there came snoring to view a lean, low bulk painted a battleship gray, a converted subchaser unless he missed a guess. On her foredeck loomed the ugly muzzle of a three pounder gun and on her narrow bridge four or five men in civilian clothes were gathered. From the main deck Donatello let out a triumphant roar.

"There's the *Garron!* What did I tell you, boys? Nothing slow about her."

"What shall we do?" asked the second mate hopelessly. "I guess that's the end."

"Keep the *Island Queen* as she is," said Sinclair stubbornly. "They haven't got the steering gear disconnected yet and we're still on the course I reported to the *Arrowhead.*"

"Stop the damned engine!" Donatello was shouting. "One of you go below and tell 'em. We'll fix that fancy bridge crowd later."

"Rockets," murmured Sinclair. "Send them up as usual. If Donatello's packet saw them then the *Arrowhead* might see them too."

The *Island Queen* was some ten minutes in slowing down but it was evident that those on board the subchaser were suspicious, for the three pounder barked and a shell splashed ominously into the sea ahead of the ship. A warning. Then those on the subchaser spotted Donatello hanging over the rail midships and waving in the sudden glare of a searchlight, and with engines pulsing smoothly the lean craft slid alongside. Donatello shouted information and a hard-faced, lean man in a snap-brim gray hat and a neat blue suit answered him and then glanced up at the bridge.

"Well," said Aline Henderson bitterly, "I guess that ends it. We've done our best and we've lost."

"If this whiskey was my own favorite brand," said Sinclair tilting a bottle, "I might get a bright idea. By the way, Miss Henderson, we might as well get things straightened while we've time—that is," he coughed, "before they toss a couple of bombs on the bridge and get rid of inconvenient and possible witnesses. I am, as Manning the second mate here knows, a special investigator, or shall we say trouble shooter for all marine problems. Brant Harris, the owner of the Island Line, cabled me in Shanghai to join this packet and keep an eye on the Raja of Balok's jewels. It looks like I've done a bum job."

"Yes," said the girl soberly. "Mr. Manning has told me about you. I guessed you were a detective anyway."

"Nothing so low, dear lady. A special investigator—marine."

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"It's about time," said the second mate feelingly. "Can't we do something?"

"Sure," Sinclair told him gravely. "You might ask Mr. Donatello to let you and the rest loose in a lifeboat. But I rather imagine it'll be a case of sunk without trace now. However, Miss Henderson. What about you? In this affair I mean. I've an idea but I'd like to hear you tell it. Just where do you come in?"

"I am—or was," said the girl bitterly, "working for the Asiatic Insurance Co. We underwrote the Raja's jewels and I was sent along to keep an eye on them."

"What a laugh," chuckled Sinclair. "And poor old Sintang was sent along by the Raja himself to do the same thing. What a mess. But why in hell weren't the cards laid on the table from the beginning? Damn Harris. He's always going around corners when he should be on the straight of way."

"On the bridge there," came Donatello's sneering voice. "Will you come down quiet or do we have to blow you off the ship?"

"We'll come quiet," called Sinclair with a meekness strange to him. "Give us time."

"I suppose that's all we can do," choked the second mate. "My God, I've been to sea fifteen years and never seen the like of this."

The whole of the *Island Queen* was bathed in bright light now as the subchaser switched on another searchlight and men from her began clambering over the bigger ship's rail. The second and third mates, the chief engineer, Sintang and the badly wounded helmsman went down the companions to be triumphantly disarmed and slapped around by Donatello's jeering men. Sinclair detained Aline Henderson with a grave gesture.

"A moment, dear lady," he admonished her. "Let me reconstruct matters as I see them. I like to have things straight. Souter, you perceive, was playing a lone hand. Lone, that is, except for Mrs. Soult? Correct?"

"Yes," agreed the girl dispiritedly. "She confessed everything to me after Captain Brandon was killed."

"Tell me?"

"Well, it seems she was Souter's woman and was supposed to make a play for the captain, get the safe combination and pass along any other information of value."

"Obvious," beamed Sinclair. "I had that pretty well figured out."

"Souter though hadn't told her just what he was after. In fact he had promised her just ten thousand dollars for her work and when she learned from Captain Brandon just what the *Island Queen* was carrying she got sore because she and Souter had always before split fifty-fifty. As she decided to play up to the captain in earnest—especially after she'd found out he intended to lift the jewels himself. I suppose he talked a lot when he was drinking and she was alone with him. She figured he would be easier to handle than Souter."

"I get it," said Sinclair. "Plain as a pikestaff. She watched the skipper open the safe once or twice and memorized the combination. She passed it along to Souter before she knew just what was what, and by that time it was too late to hold out on him and she just had to wait and see which way the cat jumped, all the time getting in stronger with the skipper."

"I suppose," agreed the girl dully. "Anyway, she thought she had the captain under control when she heard his voice that night Mr. Barnes was killed. She knew he was the killer and she thought that would make him stick to her and share with her. But then you showed her she was in danger of her own life and that put her in a turmoil again."

"So she went back to Souter and egged him on," Sinclair added. "Just like a woman. 'T'splain as a pikestaff—she wised Souter up as to when the old man would be out of his room, searching Barnes's room, of course. Poor old Barnes. He found out too much and Captain Brandon

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couldn't get him to join in the scheme and got scared and rapped him too hard. Frightened all the conspirators. Scared me. Scared you. Poor old Barnes. Then I suppose th' skipper went and told Donatello and Donatello was mad. Clumsy work, says he."

"But you can't know all that," the girl protested.

"Tush," said Sinclair. "I've got ideas and an excellent imagination."

"Come down outa that," roared Donatello. "What's the matter? You want blasting up there."

"Just a minute," Sinclair admonished him soothingly. "You can come up any time. My gun's empty and I'm telling a story. This is the way it seems to add up, dear lady. The skipper bumped Barnes. Mrs. Soult works on him and finds out he's going to search Barnes's room for any incriminating stuff left around. Don't ask me why, seeing they intended stealing or sinking the ship anyway. Me—I wouldn't give a damn but crooks have bad consciences. Anyway Souter gets a bit panicky himself after the murder and acting on his lady friend's information and advice decides to crack the safe without delay. The trouble was that you and Sintang were both watching for any such move. So he gets bumped and that eliminates that angle, and if I'm not mistaken worries the rest a lot. Never mind."

"Are you coming down?" roared Donatello again. And snarling aside, "Say, some of you mugs go up and see what's holding him."

"Pay no attention," said Sinclair amiably. "If he knew what I knew he wouldn't talk so loud."

The girl looked at him sharply.

"What do you mean? What do you know?"

"Skip it, dear lady. Lots of time—as I was saying Souter's bumped. Second mate decides to wireless home. Donatello gets worried in case someone has already wirelessed about Barnes and maybe asked for help. Donatello smacks wireless operator. Simple, eh? Donatello wants the *Island Queen* met at sea just in case help is on the way so they can lift the jewels in a pinch anyway and to hell with the contraband which was in the beginning the main business."

"Contraband?" echoed the girl, puzzled. "I didn't know we were carrying that."

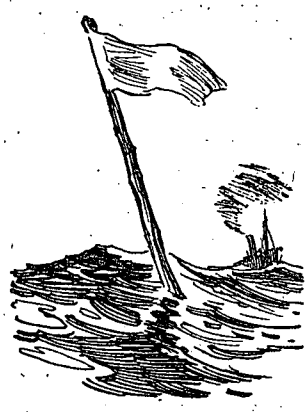
"Nor me. I don't *know* yet, but I've got healthy suspicions. Else why take the ship to the coast? Never mind."

"Didn't you hear what the boss said?" asked a hard-faced, pock-marked man coming cautiously up the port companion and jamming a gun in Sinclair's ribs. "Where's your gat? And get below, you and the skirt."

"My gun," said Sinclair amiably, "you will find in my right hand pocket. And you are welcome to it. But the lady and I have much to discuss. Leave us alone."

"Well, make it short," growled the other indifferently. "You're soon going for a ride."

"I would be disappointed if I wasn't," Sinclair assured him. "But to continue,



dear lady. Donatello becomes worried and sends out the message. Then he smacks the operator. Then he kills Captain Brandon. Probably a little premature. I think it was planned all along but he discovered our gallant skipper was losing his nerve and might become troublesome. Never mind. The picture's fairly clear, I hope.

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Except that your humble servant here gets out of confinement safely, thanks to you, slinks along to the wireless room and sends a message himself. Check. By the greatest of good fortune he happens to connect with the *Arrowhead*——"

"Then that wasn't just made up!" said the girl eagerly. "You mean you really got word through——?"

"I am amazed," remonstrated Sinclair. "How could you doubt me? I'll show you."

He deliberately walked to the bridge wing, picking up another rocket from the dozen or so the second mate had previously brought from the chartroom and laid handy. The pock-marked man followed him suspiciously but curiously. He set it in the metal tube designed for the purpose, gravely struck a match and stood back while the long colored cylinder zipped up into the night sky, its glory dimmed by the blatant searchlight glare. Donatello, on the lower bridge now with several of the newcomers from the converted subchaser, broke off a profane conversation about the trouble he had had trying to open the ship's safe—Captain Brandon never having given him the combination—to look up and rip out a hard oath. He did more than that. He leaped up the companion and took Sinclair roughly by one shoulder and swung him around.

"You fat fool!" he choked. "What in hell are you playing at now? You've caused me enough trouble!"

He smashed a hard fist to Sinclair's jaw and the plump man fell, to slowly regain his feet and wipe blood from his lips. He seemed unperturbed though Aline Henderson uttered a choked cry and turned on Donatello with blazing eyes.

"You—you swine!" she said. "An unarmed man. You know he daren't fight back now!"

Donatello looked at her with glittering eyes, his lips drawn back from his even white teeth.

"You'll get used to that, sister, before I'm done with you," he sneered. "Mr. Sinclair had it coming anyway. We'll talk that over—you and me—while we're spending money in Mexico City."

"Certainly," agreed Sinclair gently. "Let the gentleman have a last fling, dear lady. But I'm very much afraid you won't be with him in Mexico City."

"Wise guy," snapped Donatello. "Do tell."

"I just sent up a rocket. Maybe you noticed. And see?" Sinclair waved a plump hand to the north, away from the searchlight glare. Donatello whipped about and of a sudden his eyes bulged. For there, far-off, against the night sky, another rocket soared gracefully in answer, breaking in stars.

"I suspect it's the *Arrowhead,*" Sinclair assured him amiably. "And unless my memory's bad, ships of her class can make close to forty knots when pushed."

Donatello choked.

"You—damn you—how did you——?" He jerked a forty-five from his holster, half raised it, evidently thought better of the gesture, and then jumped for the companion shouting to the men on the lower bridge who were laboriously prying the still unopened safe out of the captain's cabin, with the evident intention of transfering it for safe-keeping to the subchaser. Then, as Donatello's words sank home, the whole of the *Island Queen* went suddenly into a panic and men began to run.

"After all, you can't expect them to fight a United States destroyer," Sinclair observed solemnly.

"Tell me the rest of the story," said Aline Henderson quietly.

"Women," Sinclair observed sadly to the night sky, "are like that." He mopped his forehead philosophically and went on. "Well, I don't know that there's much more. Donatello is quite obviously a left-over from prohibition days. He was probably sent to Singapore to negotiate with Breitman & Sons for munitions, I presume for a contemplated revolution as usual, the American embargo on arms making it difficult to get them close by. And then in

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Singapore luck and the Breitmans led him to the financially embarrassed Captain Brandon and so, in time, to hearing about the Raja of Balok's jewels. Brandon was O. K. about everything but to make sure, now there were the jewels involved too, Donatello insisted on shipping a lot of his own men on board and got in touch with his Mexican connections telling them to stand by in case things got too difficult, as they did. Very simple you see, and the rest you know. Now poor Donatello's all set to spend the rest of his life in jail, if he doesn't hang. Piracy on the high seas is quite a crime, and I shudder to think what a jury will do when they hear he killed Captain Brandon. It's a sad world."

"It is," agreed Aline Henderson almost tearfully. "It's all incredible, the two things linking up. I don't know what would have happened if you hadn't got in touch with that destroyer."

"Fortune," Sinclair reminded her, "favors the brave. I might also add that precaution does too. I wrote Brant Harris from Singapore that if he could manage it it might be an idea to have a government ship wander out to meet us, sort of casually you know. Or if any happened to be in these parts about this time they might keep an eye open for us. I have an idea that American interests are angling for an oil concession from the Raja of Balok and an escort to port for his jewels would be a very delicate tribute. You have to know all the angles, you see—but I've *got* to have a drink."

"Later," promised the girl. "Not now, please, for my sake."

He looked at her and they were both oblivious to the confusion and noise going on about them.

"You mean," said Sinclair, sobering suddenly, "you mean it really matters?"

"Of course," she said simply, a little flushed, taking his arm. "But let's watch the fun."

AND since there seemed nothing else to do Sinclair allowed himself to be led, slightly dazed, to the bridge rail while the subchaser cast off and slid clear, biting into the sea in a furious attempt at escape, on board of her the safe containing the Raja of Balok's jewels. Fifteen minutes later the searchlight of the United States destroyer *Arrowhead* fell upon the *Island Queen*. And ten minutes after that a calm, efficient and gray-eyed lieutenant listened to Sinclair give certain advice. Before he had finished even, the lieutenant had a man signaling the destroyer so that she gave a blast of her siren, fell away, turned, gathered speed and went off like a whippet after a rabbit, her bow-wash high and her four stacks belching smoke while her searchlight picked up far ahead the gray speck that was the subchaser, destined to be run down before another hour had passed.

"I'm glad," said Aline Henderson with a sigh of relief. "That's all settled now."

"Not quite," Sinclair corrected her.

"I must congratulate you, Mr. Sinclair," started the lieutenant politely, and then he stopped. He knew when he was not wanted, so he grinned and dropped down to the main deck to take charge.

"I don't understand," said the girl. "Why isn't it settled?"

Sinclair very deliberately lighted a cigar and kept his eyes averted.

"Well, you see, dear lady, if I wasn't a very ancient old man and possessed of numerous incurable bad habits I'd suggest ——" He stopped and rubbed his nose.

"Yes?" she inquired. "You'd suggest what?"

"I could use a partner in my business," he said thoughtfully. "And since it wouldn't always be convenient to have separate cabins why I guess we'd have to get married."

"Yes," she agreed unsteadily, "I guess we would."

THE END

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Adventurers All

A PERILOUS SWIM

IT WAS a hot, sticky day in the province of Guanacaste, up the beautiful Rio Tempisque, in August 1932. We two fellows had been sent down from California to get some Costa Rican faunal specimens for the Museum of Vertebrate Paleontology.

Having been fortunate in procuring every specimen of importance which we had come for, excepting a crocodile, and with but one day left to accomplish this after four days of stalking, we were desperately sure that we were going to be successful or know the reason why.

We had with us Miguel—"Mike"—a native guide, who had assisted us in our investigations throughout the trip, and a fearless man he had proved to be.

Four days we had been hunting near the lagoons and marshes at the head of the river, and up to this time we had no idea what an exciting adventure hunting crocodiles in the jungle swamps of Central America was going to be.

We had come armed with rifles, ropes, and poles.

From where we stood, the jungle growth outlined against the sky in the sunlight, looked thick and impenetrable. We skirted the bank in silence, keeping fairly close together, as our eyes attempted to penetrate the water's depths. Suddenly we were all startled into stiff rigidity.

A roar like a crash of thunder rent the air. We stopped in our tracks, listening, not daring to move. Again the blast. Like an explosion. This time, fairly shaking the ground beneath us.

Don was standing near me, and I breathed in his ear, "What in hell's that?"

A few feet beyond, I could make out the guide with his hand raised in warning to me. We stood as if rooted to the earth, in dead silence.

How many minutes we had retained our position I have no way of knowing; but it seemed as if my bones were gradually being converted into complete petrifaction.

All at once I came to the realization that the sticky-sweet fragrance of musk was saturating the hot, humid atmosphere. I then knew that it was a crocodile we had heard. I also knew from my studies that it was a full grown male, and the bellow or roar was accompanied by the opening of the scent glands underneath the chin, which were giving out fine, vapory jets of a strong, musky smelling fluid, the odor of which would carry for miles from the bayou.

Still we did not move.

Then a resounding splash not many yards from us, and we knew that the big chap was in the water.

THE method of the natives in killing crocodiles is to shoot them at the base of the brain, and we were anxious to get a shot at this one.

At last we could move. We took our places on the bank and watched. An hour we waited for the amphibian to appear on the surface.

Suddenly we saw the lumpy, protruding eyes and a small part of the head floating motionless, looking like a log, in the middle of the river.

Mike leveled his rifle and shot. It was a hit. The animal turned over and disappeared.

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Mike started to undress and Don and I did the same. Another shot to scare any other crocodiles in the vicinity and Mike dove in. We followed. All around where the animal had been hit we swam beneath the surface, peering ahead of us.

The water was as clear as glass, but down at the bottom we could see a film of mud, which began to swirl into the upper clearness as we stirred it into action.

The horrible knowledge that we would make excellent steak for a crocodile dinner was foremost in our minds.

Not a sign of the wounded saurian.

Mike ran along the bank and looked up the river. In the distance he saw another crocodile swimming slowly. Another shot. Another hit.

Don and I swam up the river to get it. The water became deeper and deeper. We were far into the enemies' territory. I didn't see any particular reason why we shouldn't be the victims, but we kept on. We knew that a wounded reptile would stay on the bottom until roused by an antagonist. Then it would rise to the surface in a rage, grab an arm or a leg, dive down again with its prey, holding him there until he drowned, and then come up and either swallow him in a few gulps, after breaking his bones in the powerful jaws; or if too nearly dead to eat, would let its victim float away.

We swam cautiously farther along the lagoon, peering through the murky water as best we could.

Suddenly we heard a shout of warning, and turning, I saw Mike on the shore, waving his arms and pointing to a huge crocodile on the opposite bank, hissing and snapping its jaws, and throwing its head from side to side.

I yelled to Don, and with lightning strokes we swam for the beach, where Mike was gesticulating.

None too soon. For to our horror we saw, a few yards behind us, what was apparently the wounded animal give one great leap upward from the surface of the water, probably five feet, and splash heavily back, dead.

With dexterous aim Mike threw a rope and lassooed it. In great haste we dragged it to the shore, to find it was a fine ten-foot specimen. At the same time, we watched with uneasy alertness the fiendish brute on the farther bank, which by this time was standing motionless watching us, not for a moment relaxing its vigilance.

We gutted the carcass quickly, lashed it to a pole, and were off down the jungle trail with our heavy burden, exhilarated with our success, and thankful enough to have come out whole from an adventure which might easily have cost the lives of all of us.

Dana Boynton

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BLACK JOHN HELPS THE POLICE

By JAMES B. HENDRYX

Author of "Black John Thinks Fast," "All in the Day's Work," and Other Stories of Halfaday Creek

After All, Black John Said, He Supposed Even a Chechako Hadn't Ought To Be Shot from Behind

I

THE lights blazed brightly in Dawson where men turned night into day with their drinking, and gaming, and trading. All during the long winter they had toiled on the creeks, chopping wood, tending the fires that ate slowly into the iron-hard earth, and shoveling the thawed gravel onto slowly mounting dumps. And now, with the spring clean-up behind them, they were having their fling, and adjusting themselves to the summer. Chechakos and sourdoughs mingled at the bars where the talk ran always to gold—*gold*—GOLD!

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There were a few rich men who, last fall, had been paupers. Many more who done all right, meaning they had sluiced out better than wages, and still more who reckoned their assets in experience. Whole creeks were being abandoned, while fabulous sums were being offered for claims on creeks of proven worth. And thousands were outfitting for the exploration of other creeks that no white man had ever seen.

In Cuter Malone's notorious Klondike Palace the Broncho Kid, his chair tilted back against the wall, viewed the scene with apathy. He had shipped in the fall as a wrangler on a boatload of horses that had been hastily recruited from the ranges of Montana and Idaho and dumped onto Dyea Beach to be sold as pack animals. They sold, all right—and the venture undoubtedly turned a nice profit into somebody's pocket. But the sale included no feed—and when the poor brutes scrambled ashore on the beach, they had eaten their last bellyful. The Broncho Kid loved horses—and bitter resentment rankled in his soul at thought of those two thousand rotting carcasses that lined the trail from Skagway to Bennett. They had been packed, and beaten over the snow-covered trail without an ounce of food in their bellies until they dropped from sheer exhaustion, when, with the packs ripped off, they were rolled off the trail and abandoned, not one stampeder in a hundred wasting the time and the bullet to put the miserable brutes out of their misery.

It was there that the Kid got his moniker—he borrowed a rifle, bought ammunition, and spent two days on the trail putting merciful bullets between the eyes of the suffering animals, while pack-laden men laughed and jeered, and called him the Broncho Kid, and passed on. When he could get no more ammunition he, too, joined the big stampede, working his passage to Dawson with an outfit that was short-handed. When he hit the big camp broke, it was to find that no one cared to grubstake a kid chechako, so he grabbed at the offer of Cuter Malone to do porter work at the Klondike Palace for his board and lodging.

IT DIDN'T take the Kid long to realize that the sourdoughs, the worth-while men of the big camp, avoided the Palace with its importuning painted women, its tin-horn gambling, and its rabble of drunken chechakos. He hated his job, he hated the Palace and he hated Cuter Malone who posed behind his bar with the inevitable cigar cocked at an angle from the corner of his thick lips, his big yellow diamond flashing from his necktie, and his black frock coat . . . for all the world like some obscene bird of prey battening upon human frailty.

But the winter was long and cold and, remembering the starving horses, the Kid stayed on. During that winter he learned many things—among them that several good big slugs of whiskey under his belt helped him to forget the pleading look in the soft eyes of the dying horses along the Skagway Trail. So when the drunken chechakos and the tin-horn gamblers and the painted women bought him drinks—he drank. Which is a dangerous thing for an eighteen-year-old kid to do.

Of all the regular frequenters of the Klondike Palace the Kid liked only Luke Labonte. It was not that he cherished any illusions about Labonte, whom he knew for a flashy tin-horn gambler, crooked as a dog's hind leg. But the man was kind to him. Not infrequently after a winning, he would peel a five, or a ten, or even a twenty off his roll and slip it to the Kid with the advice to "gitcha some more clothes—you look cold."

Thus is was that when Labonte proposed that upon certain occasions the Kid stroll behind some player's chair and indicate, by means of certain simple signals, the nature of his hand, he was glad to help his benefactor out, especially as Labonte took pains to explain that the damn chechakos would blow all their dust anyway, and that if he didn't take it across the table, Cuter would take it across the bar. Be it

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said to the Kid's credit that he never performed this office without certain qualms of conscience which he stilled with the thought that he had rather see Labonte get the dust than Cuter—so what the hell!

But since the break-up, with the men in from the creeks spending clean raw gold over the bars and talking of strikes, and sluices, and top-stripping, and shafts, the Broncho Kid yearned for a fling at the creeks himself. It was for that he had left the Montana horse range and worked his way northward down the long river trail; and not to do porter work in an infamous Dawson dive. But even a modest venture off the river demanded a stampeding pack, and with prices what they were, stampeding packs ran into money—and the Kid was broke. Thus, tilted back in his chair, he viewed the world sourly. He had wintered through—and that was all. Cuter Malone had fed and housed him in return for long hours of disagreeable drudgery. The money Labonte had slipped him from time to time had gone for clothing, and whiskey, and an occasional go at the cards. In his pockets reposed not a single thin dime—and the Kid wanted a drink. A couple of drinks and things wouldn't look so bad. He wondered whether Labonte would grubstake him for a trip into the hills. He glanced toward the piano against which the gambler leaned in earnest conversation with Big Nell, his present light o' love. The Kid's lips curved into just the trace of a sneer—figuring to trim some poor chump. Well, why not? If they didn't get him, Cuter would. The chechakos were all asking for it; the damn fools might as well get rid of it one way as another—so what the hell? And—"what the hell?" is premature philosophy at eighteen.

PRESENTLY Big Nell whirled off into a dance with a drunken chechako and Labonte strolled through the arched doorway into the barroom where the Kid caught his eye. As the gambler paused for a moment beside his chair the Kid broached his question:

"Hey, Luke—will you grubstake me?"

The man grinned down at him. "Grubstake you! Fer what?"

"Why, for a trip out into the hills. I might find some new crick an' make a strike. Plenty of 'em have."

"Yeah? An' a damn sight more of 'em ain't. Listen, Kid—you ain't no prospector. Hell—you don't know a sluice from a rocker. You wouldn't know gold when you seen it. What chanct do you figger you've got, when there's plenty of sourdoughs that ain't takin' out no better'n wages? Besides, what the hell do you want to go proddin' around amongst them damn cricks fer, wet to yer belly half the time, an' yer eyes full of smoke, an' yer shoulders galded with pack straps, an' yer hands all blistered to hell with a shovel? Do like I do, an' make 'em fetch it to you. Let someone else do the work, an' you take the dust. I've had my eye on you all winter. Yer a good kid, an' I like you. I was jest tellin' Nell I'm goin' to let you

in on my play, soon as I teach you a few tricks. You kin work on a percentage, first, till you git onto the ropes—then we'll go pardners. We'll git ourn, all right—an' we won't have to gouge into no gravel fer it, neither."

"I—I wouldn't mind the wettin' an' the hard work. I'm used to it. I've wrangled horses since I was fourteen, an' I like it out in the open. I don't like to hang around a dump like this all the time. I'm gettin' soft. Besides I'd never make a gambler. I ain't smart enough."

The other laughed. "I'll take a chanct on yer smartness. Hell—I ain't so smart, myself. You don't have to be. All you

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got to have is a few tricks an' then pick yer suckers. It don't take no hell of a lot of brains to outguess a drunk man."

"I'd rather you'd grubstake me," persisted the Kid. "Come on, Luke—a stampedin' pack wouldn't cost such a hell of a lot."

"Nothin' doin'. Like I said, I like you, an' I'm talkin' fer yer own good. You'll thank me fer it later when you see how easy the dust comes. You always see me with plenty of dough, don't you? An' you don't see no blisters on my hands—an' my pants ain't mud up to the knees, neither. Think that over, an' git holt of yerself. Fact is, me an' Nell's ribbin' up somethin' right now that we might let you in on. If we do you'll find you've got plenty dust in yer pocket—an' no stampedin' pack to worry about, neither."

Even as he spoke the dance ended and Big Nell steered her drunken partner into one of the little wall booths and drew the curtains. Presently a bartender bearing a tray containing a bottle of whiskey and two glasses tapped at the booth, and returned to the bar with the tray empty.

Labonte winked and glanced toward a poker table where a man was rising from a chair. "Stick around," he muttered out of the corner of his mouth. "I'll slip into that bird's place, an' after a little you might loaf over an' give me the office on that guy's hand—the one with the checked shirt, an' the big stack of chips. He looks like he's about ripe fer a play."

II

AN HOUR later Big Nell emerged from the booth and Labonte cashed in his chips and joined her at the piano.

"Well?" he asked in a hoarse undertone. "Do you still think he's got it?"

"I know it," replied the woman. "Twenty thousan' in dust. It's cached in his cabin."

"Where's his cabin?"

The woman frowned. "That's what I couldn't find out. I got him soused to the gills, but he's either too drunk to know; or he's too smart to tell. I can't figure which."

Labonte scowled. "A hell of a lot of good it'll do us if we don't know where the cabin is," he growled. "Wouldn't he tell you nothin'?"

"Only that it's on a little feeder to the Klondike, quite a ways back. There's no other claim on the feeder. It's up to you to follow him back there. The rest ought to be easy."

"Yeah, but the way he's goin' he's liable to hang around Dawson a week, an' that'll mean I've got to keep cases on him every minute so he don't slip out on me."

The woman grinned. "Oh, I took care of that, dearie. He'll be hittin' back in the mornin' after more dust. He's asleep, now—an' when he wakes up he won't even have the price of a drink on him. I lifted his poke."

"Where is it?" demanded the gambler, a gleam of avarice lighting his eyes.

"Afraid you won't get your half?" sneered the woman. "Here it is—about ten, twelve ounces left, I guess. Jest shake out my half an' stick the poke in your pocket. If we take it to the bar an' weigh it, Cuter'll grab off his ten percent. I don't want to have this dust on me in case the sucker puts up a squawk. He can't lay it to me if someone was to rob him while he's layin' there in the booth asleep."

"Thought you said he was a chechako," said Labonte, as he divided the dust. "This ain't no chechako poke. Look at that stitchin'."

"He claimed Old Bettles give it to him the other night in the Tivoli. He says he keeps his dust in a couple of caribou bladders."

Labonte pocketed the little sack and frowned. "I ain't much good on the trail," he confided. "S'pose he'd ketch me follerin' him. Er I'd git lost comin' back, er somethin'?"

The woman's eyes swept the room and came to rest on the Broncho Kid. "Well, there's the Kid," she whispered. "He's

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been a cowboy or somethin', ain't he? I'll bet he could foller him without gettin' caught. You claimed you was goin' to break him in sometime. You might's well start now."

Labonte frowned slightly. "Yeah," he said doubtfully. "I did figger on it—but I ain't so sure, now. I was talkin' with him tonight. He wanted I should grub-stake him fer a prospectin' trip. I talked him out of that—showed him how he could do a damn sight better right here in Dawson. He claimed he wasn't smart enough to make a gambler. He's smart enough, all right—it ain't that. But somehow he can't seem to put his heart into it. He tips off hands to me now and then—but I kin see he don't like to. I don't know. Either he ain't got the guts, er mebbe it's his conscience bothers him."

"Conscience," scoffed the woman—"you talk like some damn preacher."

"Yeah? Well mebbe [illegible] an' mebbe I don't. Jest because [illegible]ike you an' me has outgrow'd ourn, ain [illegible]o sign every-one has. Jest you think back an' you'll recollect that there was a time when you'd of balked at doin' the things you do now without battin' an eye. An' it's the same with me. Trouble with the Kid—he ain't tough-hearted. Ain't you heard about him shootin' all them bronchos that give out on the Skagway trail? That's how he got his name. What I mean, he won't go in on no robbery—especially if he knows it's a murder."

"Murder!" breathed the woman sharply, shuddering slightly as the word passed her lips.

Labonte's blue-green eyes fixed her with a glance of ice. "Yeah—murder," he repeated in a hard, dry voice. "We might jest as well call it by the name the police will. You don't suppose I'd leave him alive to help the police convict us, do you? I don't go into a thing without I'm ready to go the whole road. 'Dead men tell no tales' is an old sayin', an' a true one."

"I suppose so," assented the woman. "It was only—well—I kind of hadn't thought about that part of it. I guess you're right though, at that. But—the Kid wouldn't have to know about the—the killin'. All you want of him would be for trailin', an' maybe fer a lookout at the mouth of the crick while you went on up. The feeder ain't only about a mile long."

"That's a good idee," agreed the man. "But I'm afraid he won't even stand fer a robbery."

"You leave him to me," the woman muttered in a low hard voice. "I'll toughen his conscience, er his heart, er his guts—an' it won't take long, neither!"

STROLLING toward the bar she paused beside the Kid's chair. "Hello, Kid," she smiled. "You look kind of lonesome. Well, I feel kind of lonesome, too. Le's you an' me go have a nice little drink for ourself."

The Kid returned the smile. "I'd like a drink all right. But I'm broke."

"You might be; but I ain't," she laughed, and signaling to a bartender for a bottle and glasses, led the way to an empty booth. "I like my drinks settin' down, where I kin kick off these damn shoes onct in a while. These dancin' slippers is all right fer looks, but by the time you've wore 'em six, eight hours they sure raise hell with yer feet."

The bartender deposited bottle and glasses on the table, and reaching into her stocking, the woman tossed a bill onto the tray, and proffered a cigarette. "Smoke up, Kid, an' slip outside of a couple of drinks. There's nothin' like liquor when yer feelin' a little down in the mouth. What's the matter? Ain't things goin' so good?"

The Kid smiled as he held a match to her cigarette and then lighted his own. "Oh, it ain't so bad—only I ain't gettin' nowheres. I'd rather be out on the cricks instead of hangin' around this damn dump."

"Out on the cricks! You mean sloshin' around in mud an' gravel, breakin' yer back on the end of a shovel, an' cookin'

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'yer own grub, an' carryin' every damn thing you own around on yer back?"

"I wouldn't mind that part of it. I might make a strike."

"Not a chance in a million!" scoffed the woman. "All the good cricks are staked. Take it from me, Kid, yer better off right where you are. Look at Cuter an' Luke Labonte! You don't see them tearin' out the bone on no cricks, do you? An' believe me, they're makin' plenty. They use their heads, an' let the dumb ones use their legs an' arms. The damn suckers spend half a year grubbin' around on the cricks, an' then Luke er Cuter takes 'em fer their roll in an hour! It don't take no longer head than you've got to see where the percentage is. An' Luke, he likes you. He's figurin' on takin' you on for a side-kick."

"Yeah, that's what he said. But—I don't know. I've always been used to——"

"It don't make no difference what you've always been used to. A good man can get used to anything. Here—throw another one into you. An' I'm slippin' a couple of dollars into yer pocket. You better mind what I'm tellin' you, an' string along with Luke. To hell with the cricks. Leave the cricks to the boobs. I've got to go now er Cuter'll be bawlin' me out. He don't give a damn how tired a girl's feet gits. He thinks she'd ought to be hustlin' all the time. Sometime I'm goin' to tell him where to head in, an' open up a place of my own—an' if he don't like it, an' goes shootin' off his mouth, I'll bust a damn good big imperial quart along the side of his jaw. So long, Kid—better think over what I said."

With three stiff jolts of liquor under his belt, the Kid resumed his chair and tilted back against the wall. Maybe they were right, after all. Shoveling gravel would be hard work—and back-packing was hell. If only there was feed for horses. He scowled at the horror of that horse's hell that was the Skagway trail. The lights took on a softer glow, and the music sounded less raucous. "To hell with 'em," he muttered under his breath. "They ought to be gypped out of their dust—treatin' horses that way an' then leavin' 'em to die."

His eyes closed, and the next thing he knew they were opening sleepily as a hand shook his shoulder. "Go 'way," he muttered, but the shaking persisted, and he looked up into the face of Luke Labonte. The face was frowning, and beside it and a little to the rear he could see the face of Big Nell, contorted with rage. The woman's lips moved in a venomous snarl:

"The damn dirty little whelp—after me buyin' him——"

Labonte turned his head and muttered with his lips close to the woman's ear, "Shut yer mouth, er I'll smear it all over yer face! Give the Kid a chance. You don't know he's got yer ice. It wasn't nothin' but strass, anyhow——"

"You lie!" returned the woman. "It was a real stone—an' if he's got it on him, believe me, I'll squawk to the police! Corporal Downey'll know what to do with the likes of him."

"What—what's the matter?" asked the Kid, glancing from one to the other, his wits a bit woozy from the effects of strong liquor.

"You know what's the matter, you damn thief!" rasped the woman.

"Shut up," commanded Labonte. "Come on, we'll step into the back room where everyone won't be hearin' us. Fact is, we want to search you, Kid. Nell claims you pinched a rock off'n her. I told her she was crazy—but she won't be satisfied till she finds out you ain't got it. Come on. It won't take but a minute."

Passing around the rear corner of the bar the three entered a little windowless room, and Labonte lighted the bracket lamp and closed the door. "Now jest hold yer hands out away from you, Kid, while I go through yer pockets. Nell's shy a big diamond, an' she thinks you snitched it."

"Of course he snitched it!" announced the woman. "Who else could? I remember I had it in the booth where we was

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drinkin'. I pulled it off my finger an' was foolin' with it, like I do—an' instead of slippin' it back, I must of left it on the table, an' he copped it. I bought him a couple of drinks an' slipped him a couple of dollars 'cause I felt sorry for him—an' that's the way he done me!"

The Kid grinned. "Go ahead an' search," he invited. "I remember seein' you foolin' with the ring—pullin' it off an' puttin' it on—but I sure as hell didn't pinch it. I never stole anything in my life. I'm down on my luck, all right—but I wouldn't steal."

"Sure you wouldn't," agreed Labonte. "That's what I've been tellin' her. It won't take long to show her." As he spoke his hand explored the side pocket of the Kid's coat, which he turned inside out. "You satisfied it ain't in there?" he asked with a sneer in his voice.

"That ain't the only pocket he's got," replied the woman. "Go on. Search the others."

With a smile Labonte thrust his hand into the other coat pocket, and as his fingers touched the bottom, the Kid felt his arm suddenly stiffen, and the smile faded from his face. Then very slowly the hand was withdrawn, the fingers opened, and three pairs of eyes stared down at the big diamond that glittered in the lamplight upon the man's outstretched palm.

The woman's eyes blazed triumphantly. "You hold him here, while I call the police," she said, and turned toward the door. But Labonte stayed her, and slipping past, stood with his back to the closed door.

"Listen, Nell," he said. "Ferget the police."

"Fergit the police—nothin'! The dirty crook stole my diamond! You're a witness that he had it in his pocket! He'll do time fer this, er I'll know the reason why."

"What good'll it do you to stick the Kid in the can? You got yer rock back, ain't you? He was broke. He wanted a grubstake. Mebbe it was the booze. He didn't take time to think."

"I never took that ring," said the Kid. "Maybe it came off when you slipped the two dollars into my pocket. I haven't had my hand in there since."

"Slipped off—hell!" scoffed the woman. "I ain't left-handed. I slipped the money in there with my right hand, like anyone else would, but I always wear my ring on my left hand—Luke knows that."

"That's right," assented Labonte. "I guess there ain't no use denyin' that you took the ring, Kid. But—I don't hold it so much against you." He turned and faced the woman squarely. "I've stole, myself," he said evenly. "An' so have you. An' either one of us would steal again, if we seen the chanct to get away with it. An' we wouldn't have the excuse of bein' broke, either. Come on, Nell—be a sport. Lay off the police, an' give the Kid a break. You've got to remember that you ain't always done jest the right thing—none of us has."

AS LABONTE talked, the woman raised a scented handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes. "Well," she said at length, "maybe you're right, Luke. I—I guess you are right, at that. I'll shut up. I—I was awful mad, at first. But I can look at it different, now. Go on along, Kid. I won't squawk. I've got the rock back, an' that's all I care. No hard feelin's, Kid. Here—shake on it."

Impulsively, she thrust out her hand, and the Kid took it. "I'm glad you got it back," he said. "There's a mistake somewhere. I'd have given it to you as soon as I'd found it."

The woman's lips twisted into a hard smile. "That's right—stick to yer story, Kid. It's the only way." And turning, she stepped from the room.

"I'm sure obliged to you, Luke," said the Kid, when the woman had gone. "She'd have had me pinched, sure as hell, if it hadn't been for you. But honest to God I never stole that ring—never saw it except when she was foolin' with it, there at the table."

Labonte grinned. "Like she said, Kid

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—stick to yer story. But that's water over the dam now. How would you like to get in on a real job?"

"What do you mean?"

"I know where there 's twenty thousan' in dust that can be lifted by jest goin' an' gittin' it. How would you like in on it, at say, twenty-five percent?"

"You mean—steal it?"

The gambler's lips smiled frostily. "Well, puttin' it that way—yes."

The Kid shook his head. "Nope. I told the truth when I said I never stole anything—an' I don't aim to start now."

The frosty smile still held. "Yeah? It would be interestin' to see what the police would call it, if me an' Nell was to tell 'em about that rock, an' where we located it. You wouldn't want to do time fer a theft that didn't net you nothin', would you, Kid?"

The color slowly receded from the Kid's cheeks, and his eyes opened widely. "You mean—you an' she would go to the police with that, after——"

"After thinkin' things over, we might," snapped Labonte. "Yes, sir—we might do jest that. An' you wouldn't have a

chanct in the world of beatin' the rap. When you think that over, mebbe you'll decide to trail along."

"What do you want me to do?" asked the Kid between stiff lips.

"Nothin' much," replied Labonte. "Nothin' at all with the actual theft. All I want you to do is help me trail a guy to his shack, an' then stand guard at the mouth of his crick, a mile down from the cabin, an' fire a shot to give me warnin' if anyone shows up. You don't need to show up within a mile of the place. I'll take all the risk—an' pay you twenty-five percent of what's in his cache. Then when the job's done, I'll fire a shot, an' you kin' hit back to some place we'll agree on, an' I'll pay you your percentage, an' you kin go on about yer business. Fair enough, ain't it?"

The Kid nodded. "You've got me right where you want me," he said. "There's nothin' else I can do."

"That's the sensible way to look at it," said Labonte. "Stick around tomorrow. I've got a hunch this guy will be pullin' out fer his cache."

III

THE bleak, chill daylight of early summer pervaded the Klondike Palace when the chechako staggered from the booth where he had slept, sprawled over the table. The tinny piano was silent, the girls had sought their rooms, and with the chairs piled high about the edges of the dance hall, the Broncho Kid swept the polished floor. Two lamps blazed above the bar where the night shift of bartenders prepared to go off duty, and Cuter Malone, with pencil and paper, totaled the night's receipts and deposited certain heavy little sacks in the yawning safe. The poker tables were deserted, and black cloths covered the roulette and faro layouts. It was the zero hour. At a table pushed back against the wall Luke Labonte played solitaire, placing his cards with meticulous care.

Crossing to the bar the chechako fumbled through his pockets, blinking in red-eyed bewilderment as his trembling fingers came forth empty.

"Hey," he muttered thickly, leaning forward upon the bar, "I've be'n robbed!"

The two bartenders, divesting themselves of their aprons, grinned, and Cuter Malone paused in his reckoning and regarded the man with a fishy stare.

"Yeah? That's what they all say when

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they wake up an' find they've shot their roll. Believe me, brother, you look from here like you'd got yer money's worth last night." He motioned to a bartender, who set a bottle and glass before the man. "Have an eye-opener on the house—an' things won't look so bad."

With trembling fingers the man slopped some liquor into the glass, and resting both elbows on the bar, conveyed the drink to his lips with his two hands.

"But my poke," he said at length, having found that the drink would stick. "If I'd blow'd all my dust I'd have my poke, wouldn't I? The last I remember there was still ten, fifteen ounces in it. I was drinkin' with that big blonde."

"Listen," said Cuter, "with the load you was packin' las' night you wasn't in no shape to remember nothin'. How the hell would I know what you done with yer poke? A man can't walk on one leg. Throw another one into you, an' git holt of yerself. I never begrudge a man a couple of drinks—the way you're feelin'."

"She rolled me, that's what she done—right there in the booth," persisted the man.

"Yeah? Well, where's yer proof?" sneered the proprietor. "Mebbe if you stick around till tonight when she shows up, she'll tell you all about it. Er mebbe you better go tell the police—they only git about forty of them squawks every mornin' when business is good. No one ever blows their dust—they're always robbed."

"It don't matter so much," retorted the man, turning from the bar. "There's plenty more where that come from. But I'll be damned if I'll ever shove another ounce acrost the bar of a damn gyp-joint like this."

CUTER'S eyes flickered balefully. "On yer way, piker," he growled, "before you hit the street on yer ear!" The two bartenders started for the man, but the door closed behind him and Cuter turned to Labonte. "How about it?" he demanded. "Did Big Nell take him fer his pile? If she did, she didn't kick in no ten percent to me. What the hell does she think I'm runnin' here—a benefit?"

Labonte smiled, and shook his head. "No, I don't think she took him fer nothin' except what drinks he bought her. I was keepin' cases on her, too. It's fifty-fifty on the take between Nell an' me; so I've got a damn sight more holler comin' than you, if she did. He dropped most of his dust in a poker game. His poke didn't have no ten ounces in it when I seen it last—an ounce er two mebbe, but no more. Nell ain't no piker. She wouldn't go fer no flat poke like that."

The day shift of bartenders and house gamblers came on, and with a wink to the Broncho Kid, who had finished sweeping the dance hall, Labonte slipped out onto the street where he was joined a few minutes later by the Kid.

"There he goes," said the gambler, pointing to the chechako who was just passing the A. C. Company store. "He'll be hittin' out fer his claim, directly. Keep him in sight, an' I'll slip down to my shack an' git my stampedin' pack, an' we'll foller him. I always keep a pack handy—jest in case. I'll pick up a canoe, too."

Even at this early hour the river-front was a scene of busy activity. Canoes, poling boats, and row boats were arriving and departing, for the Klondike was the thoroughfare for the men of many creeks. Thus it was that no one noticed the two-man canoe that pushed out from the bank and proceeded up the river in the wake of the chechako.

Late in the afternoon the chechako landed and drew his canoe from the water at the mouth of a tiny rill that entered the larger river through a mere slit in the rocks. With hardly a glance downriver, the man disappeared into the slit, and a few minutes later Labonte and the Kid landed and drew their canoe up beside the other. The gambler's orders were brief:

"You wait right here," he said, thrusting a rifle into the Kid's hands, "an' if anyone starts up through that crack you shoot at a mark er somethin', an' I'll know some-

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one's comin' an' lay low. Chances is he'll hit straight fer his cache when he gits there, an' then slip into his cabin fer somethin' to eat—er mebbe the other way around. It won't make no difference. Anyway, when he's in his cabin, I'll clean out the cache, an' then climb out onto the rim an' fire a shot. He'll think it's someone huntin' in the hills, an' you'll know the job is done. Then you step into the canoe an' paddle back down, an' wait fer me at the mouth of Bonanza. That way we won't be seen together up here, an' no one'll see me come back out through the crack."

"O. K.," said the Kid. "But I wisht to hell I'd never got into this. Believe me this is my first job of this kind—an' my last! When I get my share of the dust, I'm buyin' me an outfit an' hittin' fer the cricks."

Labonte grinned. "Don't lose yer nerve, Kid," he said. "When you find out how easy it comes, you won't be talking no more about the cricks. Couple of hours from now we'll be paddlin' back down the Klondike with twenty thousan' in dust in the canoe. There ain't no gravel that'll shuck out the dust like that. Keep yer eye peeled now—I'm gone."

FOR half an hour or more the Kid paced up and down bank, turning his back toward the river as an occasional canoe passed up or down. He had been accustomed to sleeping in the daytime, but this day he had had no sleep, and the unaccustomed work at the paddle and the track-line had made him woefully tired. Seating himself, he propped his back against the base of the rock, and with the rifle across his knees dozed fitfully.

"Hello, Kid! What the hell you doin' here?" He awoke with a start to stare into the smiling faces of two men. They were sourdoughs whom he had seen about the Tivoli—Moosehide Charlie, and Camillo Bill. Once Moosehide had bought him a drink, telling him it was on account of those horses he heard the Kid had killed on the Skagway trail.

The Kid covered his confusion as best he might. "Oh, I was jest hittin' out on a prospectin' trip," he explained, "an' I ain't much used to paddlin'. I got tired, an' was ketchin' me a little rest."

The men laughed. "You ain't got much of an outfit fer a trip into the hills," said Camillo Bill, glancing into the canoe. "When she gives out you might drop around an' see me. I don't grubstake chechakos as a general thing, but I done heard how you took the trouble to shoot all them horses last fall when all the rest of the damn chechakos was passin' 'em by—an' that proves you ain't like the rest. Besides that damn hell-hole of Cuter Malone's ain't no place fer a young feller to be hangin' around."

"Thanks," the Kid managed to say. "If—if I don't have good luck this time, I may take you up."

"Well, we'll be pullin' along," said Moosehide. "We was jest passin' by an' seen someone layin' here. We thought he might be hurt er somethin'. Good luck. An' say, if you do as well as that chechako that staked up that crack right there beside you, Camillo'll be damn glad he staked you. Swanson his name is. He jumped in the river an' saved Old Bettles's life last fall, an' Bettles staked him. This spring he turned in twenty thousan' in dust fer Bettles's share. Onct in a while a chechako makes good."

Half an hour after the departure of the two sourdoughs, the Kid was aroused by the sound of a shot, and stepping hastily into his canoe, he dropped rapidly downstream to the mouth of Bonanza where an hour later he was joined by Labonte.

"Did you get it?" asked the Kid apathetically.

The gambler scowled. "Yes, I got it—what there was of it. He spat the words out angrily. "But there wasn't no twenty thousan' like Nell said. The damn fool! She's like all the rest of 'em—believes everything every drunken chechako tells

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her. He took his time about goin' to his cache. Set down an' et a big supper first. That's what took me so long. An' when I finally got a crack at the cache there was about a hundred an' twenty-five ounces in it—a lousy two thousan' dollars, if there's that."

"He had twenty thousan' around there somewheres," replied the Kid, looking Labonte squarely in the eye. "Old Bettles grubstaked him, an' Moosehide Charlie an' Camillo Bill told me he turned in twenty thousan' fer Bettles' share."

"Moosehide Charlie an' Camillo Bill!" exclaimed the man, in sudden alarm. "Where in hell did you see them?"

"They stopped an' talked to me up there while I was waitin' fer you. I told 'em I was hittin' out on a prospectin' trip an' I was restin'. Camillo Bill, he said how I didn't have much of an outfit, an' if I run out of supplies he'd grubstake me, like Old Bettles staked this other chechako. An' that's jest what I'm goin' to do."

"Like hell it's what yer goin' to do!" cried the gambler, his face livid. "Yer goin' to git to hell out of these parts, right now! Me, too. Here—I ain't got no scales along, but I'll give you yer twenty-five percent. We'll divide the dust in four piles an' you take one of 'em an' hit out. You can stop an' git you an outfit in Dawson, an' then you hit fer Halfaday Crick—an' I'll hit downriver fer Alasky. We can't be seen together—not after them fellas seein' you, we can't!"

AS THE man talked, he pulled a caribou bladder from his pocket, and divided the dust it contained into four equal piles. One of these piles he poured into the poke that Big Nell had taken from the chechako, and tossed it to the Kid. "There you are—right around five hundred dollars in dust. It'll git you an outfit—but you don't want to let no grass grow under yer shoes. This robbery will be out in a day er so an' when Camillo an' Moosehide tells where they seen you—the Mounted will be on yer tail in a jiffy. You take the canoe an' hit out. I'll make my way down afoot. There ain't no one seen me—an' we don't want to be seen together." The man paused and, pulling a six-gun from beneath his shirt, thrust it into the Kid's hand. "Take this gun, an' if the police git on yer tail blast hell out of 'em. Don't be afraid to shoot—it'll be you er them fer it."

"I wouldn't shoot no policeman," said the Kid, turning the gun over in his hand. "An' where the hell's Halfaday Crick?"

"You go up the Yukon seventy-five, eighty miles an' then turn up the White—it's the first big river that comes in from the right as you go up. Then foller up the White till you come to Halfaday an' go on up it till you come to Cushing's Fort. They're all outlaws up there, an' there don't no police dare to bother 'em none. Old Cush an' Black John Smith 'tends to that. Onct you git to Halfaday, yer safe. Stick the gun under yer shirt, now—an' git agoin' before news of this job leaks out. Me, I'm gone!"

The man turned at the words and slipped swiftly into the bush, and the Broncho Kid found himself alone. Slipping the gun beneath his shirt, he stepped into the canoe, and headed downriver for Dawson.

IV

"WHAT I claim," began Old Cush, as he folded his newspaper, shoved his square rimmed spectacles from nose to forehead, and reached bottle and glasses from the back bar, as Black John Smith entered the room, "if men wasn't sech damn fools they'd git along better."

Black John grinned, and reached for the bottle. "Yeah? What partic'lar brand of damnfoolery has got you riled up, now?"

"I was readin' a piece in the paper here, where it tells about some fellas is tryin' to put some kind of an ingyne in buggies an' make 'em go without no horses hitched to 'em. Anyone with any sense would know that it ain't agoin' to work er it would of be'n done long ago, an' besides everyone knows that horses is cheaper than ingynes,

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an' on top of that, it would take an ingyneer to run 'em—an' anyone kin drive a horse."

"Well, most anyone could learn to run an engine, too, couldn't they?"

Old Cush snorted in disgust. "Who the hell would want to? Look at it sensible—the way it is now, a young fella hitches up his horse to his red wheeled buggy an' drives over to his girl's house an' takes her fer a ride of an evenin'. There's jest him an' her, an' there's more courtin' done that way than any other. But s'pose he had one

of these damn ingyne buggies an' come whistlin', and snortin', an' puffin' up to her place an' she'd git in, an' every time he wanted to say somethin' to her, the fireman would be shovelin' in some coal, er the damn pop-valve would be blowin' off steam, an' her face would be black as a nigger's from the smoke, an' her eyes full of cinders—a hell of a lot of courtin' he'd git done, wouldn't he?"

"As fer as I'm concerned," laughed Black John, "you could score one fer the engine."

"Everyone ain't no woman-hater, like you," retorted Cush. "An' then this piece went on to say that inside of twenty-five years there would be more of these ingyne vehicles used than horse ones—an' not only fer buggies, but heavy haulin', too. An' not only that, but it claimed that there's other fellas workin' on some kind of a boat that will go along in under the water instead of on top of it, an' other folks was figgerin' on some kind of a flyin' machine that would fly through the air with folks in it. The piece claimed that it ain't onpossible that all them contraptions will git figgered out so they'll work. What I claim, men is damn fools that tries to go agin nature. The Old Fella Up Above, He know'd what He was doin' when He built the world, an' if He'd wanted folks to go around under water, He'd of give 'em gills an' fins. An' if He'd wanted 'em to fly he'd of put feathers an' wings onto 'em, an' if He didn't expect 'em to use horses to pull 'em around He wouldn't of made so damn many of 'em. Why in hell can't men be satisfied to jest be men, instead of tryin' to be a bird er a fish?"

"The ground suits me all right to stay on," chuckled Black John, "but I don't begrudge folks inventin' things. I s'pose men drug their stuff around fer a hell of a while before someone invented a wheel."

"Huh—anyone would know a wheel would work. It didn't have to be invented. Hell—they had wheels on them chariots, way back in Bible times. My last wife, she was religious, an' she had a book of Bible pitchers, an' I rec'lect one of 'em with two-wheeled chariots in it. It was where this here Fario's army got drounded in the Red Sea. The feller got a damn good snap shot of it from the bank—he ketched 'em jest when the waves was curlin' over 'em from both sides, an' there was horses, an' men, an' spears, an' chariots all mixed up in a hell of a mess—an' Old Moses on the other bank a thumbin' his nose at 'em."

"Did they have that in the picture?" asked Black John.

"Well, I changed that part a little with a lead pencil," admitted Cush. "It made my wife kind of mad, till I explained to her how it was common sense that that's what he'd be doin' instead of holdin' up a stick, like some damn band master. The photograft was prob'ly faked, anyhow, because accordin' to it, that there Red Sea wasn't no wider than the Erie Canal. Anyone would know that no camera could ketch Moses clean acrost a reg'lar sea."

A SLIGHT sound attracted their attention, and both men glanced toward the door.

"Damned if it ain't Corporal Downey!"

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cried Black John. "Come on, Downey, belly up. Cush is buyin' a drink. Has anyone committed mebbé some sin; or are you jest on a vacation?"

"Fat chance I've got fer a vacation," grinned Downey, "with the whole country fillin' up with chechakos. Fact is, I'm up here huntin' a murderer."

"A fresh one? Er one that's mebbe abode amongst us fer a spell?"

"He couldn't of been here more'n a week," Downey replied. "The murder's only a couple of weeks old."

Black John shook his head. "Yer out of luck as fer as Halfaday is concerned," he said. "We ain't had no new arrivals this spring."

Downey frowned. "You sure no one could have slipped in onto the crick without your knowin' it?"

"Not a chanct. Me an' Cush lives what some might conclude was more or less sedentary lives, but One Armed John, he flits up an' down the crick like a lost soul. An' he reports everything he sees an' hears almost before it happens. A corpse can't even show up on the crick without him knowin' it—much less a live man. What fer lookin' would this malefactor be, in case he'd show up later?"

"He's a chechako—young fella somewheres around eighteen, nineteen. Be'n hangin' out around Cuter Malone's doin' porter work all winter. The Broncho Kid, they call him, on account of him feelin' sorry fer all them horses that was dyin' along the Skagway trail last fall an' shootin' 'em to put 'em out of their misery. He trailed a chechako name of Swanson to his shack, an' shot him in the back of the head with a forty-one calibre pistol, an' robbed his cache of right around twenty-thousan' dollars in dust. This Swanson got drunk down around Cuter's an' bragged about his dust."

"Prob'ly didn't have no sech amount in his cache," opined Black John. "Them chechakos all lies."

"Yeah, he had it, all right. Old Bettles grubstaked him last fall, an' this spring when he cleaned up his dump he turned Bettles over twenty thousan' fer his share. He struck it lucky up a little one-man crick."

"What makes you think this Broncho Kid would hit fer Halfaday?" asked Black John.

"Luke Labonte tipped me off—him an' Big Nell, one of the dance hall girls at the Palace. It seems this kid is crooked as hell. He'd pinched a rock off Big Nell, an' Labonte searched him an' found it on him, an' the woman felt sorry fer him an' wouldn't turn him in. They both seen him stickin' around pretty clost to this guy when he was soused the night before the murder, an' when he pulled out fer his claim early next mornin' both Labonte an' Cuter seen him foller him."

"Huh," grunted Black John. "You've got a swell bunch of witnesses, ain't you, Downey? I wouldn't believe neither Cuter, nor Labonte, nor that big blonde gal if they was to stand on a stack of Bibles an' swear that black was white."

"Me neither," smiled Downey. "But I've got plenty of corroborative evidence to back 'em up, in this case. Moosehide Charlie an' Camillo Bill seen an' talked to the Kid right at the mouth of Swanson's crick on the day of the murder. He claimed he was hittin' out on a prospectin' trip, but they seen that he didn't have nothin' but a two, three day outfit along, an' they claim he seemed kind of nervous while he was talkin' to 'em. He was known to have be'n broke all winter, an' that same night he comes into the A. C. store around three, four o'clock in the mornin' an' buys him an outfit an' pays fer it in dust. He's guilty, all right—an' it was a damn dirty murder, at that."

"Yeah," agreed Black John. "The only mitigatin' circumstance I kin think of is that the victim was a chechako—but I s'pose even they hadn't ought to be shot from behind. I'm sorry, Downey, that yer man ain't showed up. Such an ornery young punk as him wouldn't be no addition

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to our midst, as a newspaper would say. He prob'ly hit downriver."

"We've got the downriver points covered —upriver ones, too. I don't think he can get out of the country. If he's hidin' out in the hills, it'll only be a question of time when he'll have to show up for supplies, an' then we'll nab him. Labonte claimed the Kid was askin' about Halfaday."

"Whatever that damn Luke Labonte says should be took with a dose of salts," opined Black John. "If he was twict as crooked as what he is, he'd be straight as a string."

"I'll figure that one out while I'm goin' back," laughed the young officer. "So long. Busy as we are, I'm sure sorry I had to make this trip fer nothin'."

V

ONE afternoon some two weeks after Corporal Downey's departure, a young man stepped into the saloon and interrupted a game of cribbage between Old Cush and Black John. He was lean and clean and clear-eyed, and as he advanced into the room Old Cush rose from the table and took his place behind the bar.

"I s'pose this is Cushing's Fort on Halfaday Crick, ain't it?" he asked, as he laid a limp gold sack on the bar. "I'm buyin' a drink."

"Such supposition is founded on fact," admitted Black John, as he ranged himself beside the newcomer.

"This first un's on the house," said Cush, ignoring the sack as he set out bottle and glasses.

"I'll take water, if it's jest the same to you," smiled the youth. "I havn't had a drink of licker in a month, an' I feel better without it."

"I got water here fer to rinse glasses in," replied Cush, "but if a man would want to drink any, he better go down to the crick."

"Give me a cigar, then. Smith is my name—John Smith."

As Black John filled his glass, he scowled. "That's one lie that you can't git away with on Halfaday," he said. "Us Smiths is a long-sufferin' an' much maligned family, an' there's some of us that ain't, mebbe, kep' both our feet in the straight an' narrow path, as the Good Book says. But we draw the line somewheres."

"What do you mean?"

"Meanin' that me an' Cush here don't give a damn what yer name is. We're satisfied to call you by the same one they do in Dawson—the Broncho Kid."

"How—how did you know?" asked the other, glancing into the frowning eyes that stared coldly above the heavy black beard.

"Corporal Downey told us, when he was up here huntin' you. You was damn lucky to dodge him, both comin' an' goin'."

"I didn't dodge anybody. I've been lost fer about three weeks. I went up the wrong crick—Ladue Crick, some Indians told me the name of it is. I ran onto a village of 'em way up near the head of it, an' one of 'em that could talk a little English, told me how to get here."

"He didn't do us no favor when he told you," retorted Black John.

"I thought—that is, I heard that you were all outlaws, up here. An' I guess from now on that's where I belong—among outlaws."

"Yeah? Well, the fact is that most of us here on Halfaday is outlawed fer one reason er another. But as far as I know, not a damn one of us is outlawed fer sneakin' up an' murderin' a man in his cabin, an' then robbin' his cache. We don't figger it's any of our business what any man done before he come to Halfaday —an' there won't be no exceptions made in your case. But after a man gits here his sins has got to be committed so damn secret that there don't none of us git onto 'em, er he gits hung—an' I'm jest remindin' you that our hangin' laws covers a multitude of sins, as the Good Book says. Bearin' them facts in mind, if I was you I'd move on. Like I said, we won't hang you fer that murder up the Klondike, but under our rules of evidence, it won't do you much good to have it mentioned at the trial."

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"Murder!" exclaimed the youth, his face paling perceptibly under the tan. "Good God—I never murdered any one! I never robbed his cache."

"Whose?" asked Black John icily.

"Why, the chechako's—Swanson, his name was. You say Corporal Downey was up here huntin' me. That's what he'd be after me for. Moosehide Charlie an' Camillo Bill saw me that day at the mouth of Swanson's little crick. I was mixed up in it, all right—but there wasn't any murder."

"No? Well, mebbe you've got some fancy name fer it when some damn skunk up an' sends a forty-one calibre bullet crashin' through the back of a man's head in his own cabin. We're kind of blunt spoken up here. We call it murder. I s'pose you ain't got a forty-one pistol hid somewheres in yer pack?"

The Broncho Kid's eyes widened in horror. "Why, I don't know—mebbe I have. Luke Labonte handed me his gun an' told me to hit out fer Halfaday Crick when he give me my share of the dust. It might be a forty-one. I never looked."

Black John's brows drew into a puzzled frown as his eyes read the genuine horror registered in the youth's face. "Luke Labonte?" he muttered, more to himself than to the other. "H-u-u-m, it was Luke Labonte that Downey said tipped him off to where you'd went. Mebbe, Kid, you'd better begin at the beginnin' an' tell the whole story. It might be jest barely possible that Downey is barkin' up the wrong crick."

FOR an hour Black John and Old Cush listened, as the Broncho Kid, starting with his arrival in Dawson, and his hated job at Cuter Malone's Klondike Palace, told of Labonte's casual kindness, of his suggestion that the Kid occasionally tip off hands to him at the poker table, of Big Nell's accusation of theft, and of Labonte's forcing him by threat of arrest, to serve as lookout while he slipped up and robbed the cache, of the gambler's evident terror when he learned that Camillo Bill and Moosehide Charlie had talked to the Kid at the mouth of the creek, and of his suggestion that the Kid hit for Halfaday, of his division of the two thousand dollars in dust which he claimed was all he had taken from the chechako's cache, and of his thrusting the revolver into his hand, with the injunction to blast hell out of the police if they should overtake him. "But," he concluded, "he didn't say anything about shooting Swanson. He was cussin' about there only bein' two thousan' dollars in the cache. He said he was goin' to hit downriver."

"Yeah," opined Black John, "an' instead of that he hit right back to Dawson, an' him an' Big Nell tipped you off to the police. An' there was twenty thousan' in that cache, all right—Downey said this chechako had turned in twenty thousan' to Bettles fer his share. He gypped you, Kid—gypped you, an' then set Downey on yer trail, with evidence planted on you that would hang you higher'n hell. Look at

that sack there on the bar. Old Bettles give Swanson that sack—see the B worked in the corner of it. All Bettles' sacks is like that—an' Labonte know'd that, don't you never think he didn't."

"But—ornery as Labonte is, I can't believe he'd commit a deliberate murder."

"It was deliberate, all right," retorted Black John. "All planned out before he started. That's why he told you he'd fire a shot fer a signal to you that the job was done. He know'd you'd hear the shot—an' he needed an excuse fer it."

"The police will never believe me in the face of all that evidence," said the Kid.

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"Nobody saw Labonte anywhere near that crick. What the hell will I do?"

"You might throw yer stuff in my shack fer the present," said Black John, "till me an' Cush has time to figger this thing out. An' besides, you ain't told the whole story yet. How about all them horses you shot, back on the Skagway trail?"

"Oh, that? I done it because I couldn't bear to see 'em suffer. Them damn cusses jest left 'em there to die. But that didn't have nothin' to do with this trouble I'm in."

"Not strickly speakin', mebbe," replied Black John. "It's jest one of them straws like the Good Book says shows which way the wind's blowin'. Before you go over to the shack you might dig out that forty-one pistol an' leave it here with me, along with that there sack of Bettles's."

VI

WHEN the Kid had departed with his pack, Black John examined the revolver and laid it on the bar beside the sack. "It's a forty-one all right," he announced. "Cush, that kid's tellin' the God's truth," he added with conviction.

"I couldn't say," replied the sombre faced proprietor of Cushing's Fort.

"I could see it in his eyes—he didn't know no more about that murder than I did. An' his story was so damn straight an' convincin', it couldn't be a lie."

"Mebbe not."

"That damn Luke Labonte is a skunk!"

"An' that's puttin' it mild," agreed Cush, filling his own glass and shoving the bottle across the bar.

"I'm hittin' fer Dawson," said Black John, returning his empty glass to the bar. "I'm takin' the Kid along. An' this gun an' this sack. An' by the way, Cush—you rec'lect that there fund of fifty thousan' dollars that was stole off'n that manager of the Starbuck Mine, over in Alasky? It was in bills, an' that fella left 'em here, claimin' we could use 'em fer whatever purpose we seen fit? Well, jest you weigh me out eighteen thousan' in dust an' charge it up agin my share of them bills. I'm takin' that along to Dawson, too."

Old Cush busied himself at the safe and piled fourteen little sacks of dust upon the bar. Then he made certain entries in his book.

"There's the dust, John," he said. "An nine thousan' of it's charged agin me. I'm jest remindin' you, though, that if you think Downey will be satisfied if you turn that chechako's dust back, yer way off yer nut. You got to remember there was a murder went along with that robbery."

Black John grinned. "I ain't aimin' to turn no dust back to Downey," he said. "Hell, this here's jest a little present fer Luke Labonte."

"Sometimes, John," replied Old Cush dryly, "a man can't hardly keep from wonderin' what you use fer brains. Even at that, yer schemes generally seems to work out."

"It's on account of the Kid," said Black John. "He's in a tough spot, the way things is. It's only a question of time till Downey would find out he was up here, an' come an' git him—er else drive him acrost into Alasky, an' he'd either be hung fer a murder he didn't know nothin' about, er he'd be on the run fer the rest of his life. He's a good kid. We got to remember he shot all them horses—an' that's the only thing he didn't tell us."

"Yeah—I know," agreed Cush. "An' if that eighteen thousan' in dust will square him with the law, he's shore welcome to my half. But I can't figger out how it's goin' to help."

"You don't have to," retorted Black John. "Jest you leave the figgerin' to me. The Kid an' I'll be pullin' out fer Dawson, in the mornin'."

THE late dusk of early summer was gathering over the Yukon as a canoe with two occupants dropped on down past Dawson and beached at Moosehide, the Indian village located a few miles below the big camp. Drawing the light craft from the water, they proceeded to a makeshift

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hovel of tarpaper and boards that stood a short distance back from the river. Black John tapped lightly upon the door jamb with his knuckles, and in a moment the sagging door opened a few inches, and the face of an old Indian appeared.

"Hello, Owl Man!" said Black John. "This fella my friend. You keep him here. Tomorrow noontime—you bring him police house Dawson. Savvy?"

The Indian nodded glumly and peered stolidly at the Kid. "Poliss hont um long tam—keel som' man. Hont in all de house." He indicated the hovels of the village with a sweep of his arm.

"Yeah, I know. But he never done it. I'm goin' up an' tell 'em about it."

"Mebbe-so poliss git mad. Mebbe-so t'ink I hide um. Mebbe-so mak' me, w'at you call—arres'."

"No, they won't arrest you. I'll be there. An' don't stand there givin' me none of yer back-talk, neither. You do like I say, even if they hang you. You ain't fergot the time I saved you from them Sticks, when they was goin' to butcher you, over on Shorty Crick, have you?"

The Indian nodded and motioned the Kid inside. "Noontam com' poliss house," he repeated, and closed the door abruptly as Black John struck out on foot up the trail for Dawson.

Stopping in the Klondike Palace for a drink, the big man assured himself that Luke Labonte was busy at a poker table, and passed unnoticed from the room. An hour later, he stepped into police headquarters to be greeted by Corporal Downey who looked up from the papers that cluttered his flat top desk.

"Hello, John! What you doin' in Dawson? Come down to trade the Halfaday clean-up for bills?"

Black John shook his head. "No, some of the boys ain't cleaned up yet. An' what with some of 'em cachin' their dust, Cush's safe'll take care of the stuff fer a while. I jest kind of sa'ntered down fer a drink er two, an' a stud game, mebbe—if the sourdoughs is in town. By the way, Downey, you rec'lect that there Broncho Kid you was huntin' a while back. Well, he showed up on the crick, couple of weeks after you was there."

"Couple of weeks? How in hell did I miss him on the river, then?"

"He wasn't on the river. He got lost an' took off up Ladue Crick an' shoved clean on up to the Siwash village. They put him right, an' he come acrost to Halfaday overland."

Corporal Downey eyed the big man narrowly. "This is the first time you've ever tipped me off to anyone bein' on the crick—that is openly, I mean. There's been times that I've maybe draw'd certain conclusions from somethin' you might of let slip. You've recovered stolen property for me, but you've never come right out before and told me that a certain man was on the crick. What's the answer?"

Black John grinned. "There ain't no answer to that one—except that you've kind of went off half cocked. I didn't say the Kid was on Halfaday. I said he was there a short time back. He ain't there now."

"Where is he?"

"Now listen, Downey—if I was to set here an' tell you where everyone is that ain't on Halfaday, I'd be talkin' till God knows when."

"Did you call a miners' meetin' an' hang him?"

"No. We might of, though, in case he'd be'n guilty of somethin'. Course, it ain't none of our business what a man done before he come to Halfaday—but even at that, if he'd been guilty of murderin' that there chechako, like you claimed, he might of had quite a hard time steerin' clear of all our skullduggery laws. Fact is, Downey, he never knocked that fella off. He didn't even know there'd be'n a murder."

It was Corporal Downey's turn to smile. "No?" he drawled. "Well, then, maybe you could tell me who did do it?"

Black John shook his head. "You know damn well, Downey, that I don't go about the country tattlin' on folks jest

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because they happen to murder some chechako. At that, I've got a good guess. But you can't hang a man on a guess. The law ain't that flexible."

"What makes you think the Kid didn't do it?"

"Why, he told us so—me an' Cush, both!"

"Of course," replied Downey sarcastically, "that lets him out. But how about Moosehide and Camillo Bill seein' him at the mouth of that crick?"

"If you was to hang everyone that was seen at the mouth of a crick, you'd be a damn sight busier'n what you are," replied Black John. "An' what's more, instead of gittin' twenty thousan' out of that job, like you claimed, the Kid only got a lousy five hundred in dust."

"What!" exclaimed Corporal Downey. "Here a minute ago you were tellin' me the Kid never even knew there was a murder committed—an' now you say he got five hundred in dust out of it!"

"Yeah. Quite a difference, ain't it—between twenty thousan' an' five hundred?"

The young officer frowned in disgust and turned to his papers. "When you get through talkin' in riddles, I'll listen to you," he snapped.

BLACK JOHN chuckled. "Hell, I thought the police liked riddles. Take all these here detective stories you read in the magazines, the police is always solvin' some riddle that it looks like no one could ever figger out. An' here you git peeved if someone tells you one that's plain as the nose on yer face."

"Policin' in magazines, an' policin' on the Yukon is two different things," retorted Downey sourly. "The Kid's guilty, all right. He was known to be broke all winter, an' then on the night of the murder, he buys him a stampedin' outfit in the A. C. Store, an' pays for it in dust."

"I'll bet it was less than five hundred he spent," replied Black John. "I told you he got five hundred, an' he had some left when he hit Halfaday. But like I told you, he ain't guilty of no murder."

"Who did kill Swanson, then?"

"I ain't in the police business—an' it ain't up to me to say. But let's jest run the facts over, an' you kin draw yer own conclusions. Like you told me an' Cush, this kid portered all winter in the Klondike Palace, an' Cuter didn't pay him nothin' but his board an' lodgin'. Whatever else he got was in the way of tips, an' Labonte was his best tipper—slippin' him a piece of change, now an' then out of the goodness of his heart—an' you know as well as I do how good that would be.

"Bye-an'-bye, Labonte kind of asked the Kid to tip off hands to him, jest as a favor. The Kid didn't like it, but Labonte had been good to him.

"Then one evenin'—it was the evenin' Swanson was in the Palace on a drunk—Labonte hints to the Kid that he know'd where a chechako could be took fer right around twenty thousan'. But the Kid don't stand fer it. A little while later Big Nell buys him a couple of drinks an' slips him a couple of dollars—an' then in a couple of hours, she squawks that she's been robbed of a diamon' ring, an' accuses the Kid of pinchin' it off'n her while they was drinkin' in a booth. Labonte pretends to stick up fer the Kid, an' they git him into Cuter's back room an' Labonte searches him—to show Big Nell he ain't got it—an' of course, he finds the rock in the Kid's pocket. Big Nell puts on a show, an' yells that she'll call in the police—an' Labonte, still posin' as the Kid's friend, talks her out of it.

"Then when Big Nell goes out, Labonte puts the screws on the Kid—either he'll help him out on the robbery, or he'll go to jail fer stealin' the ring. Both him an' Big Nell would swear they found it in his pocket. Labonte tells the Kid that all he has to do is stay at the mouth of the crick an' fire a warnin' shot if anyone starts to head up it, while Labonte follers the chechako up an' steals the dust out of his

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cache. An' here's where he pulls a fast one—he tells the Kid that when he's through with the job he'll fire a shot to let the Kid know it's over, then the Kid is to drop back to the mouth of Bonanza an' wait fer him to come an' give the Kid his share of the dust, which was to be twenty-five percent. He done that, so when the Kid heard the shot, he'd never think it was a murder—only the agreed signal.

"The Kid seen that they had him, an' it looked like a shore stretch in jail fer somethin' he never done, so he agrees. It was while he was actin' as lookout that Moosehide an' Camillo seen him there.

"It come off jest like Labonte planned, an' when he j'ined up with the Kid at the mouth of Bonanza, he give him five hundred in dust—tellin' him that Big Nell had lied to him, an' there was only two thousan' in the cache. Then when the Kid told about seein' Moosehide an' Camillo Labonte got scairt as hell. He told the Kid to hit fer Halfaday, an' he claimed

he was pullin' out fer Alasky, down the river. I jest seen him playin' poker in the Palace, so I guess he didn't do no pullin' out. Instead, he stuck around an' seen to it that you took out after the Kid—an' him without a chanct in the world to prove he didn't knock the chechako off, if you'd of ketched him. Big Nell an' Cuter would of alibied Labonte, so the Kid's whole story would of sounded like a clumsy lie.

"It's my good guess that Swanson got drunk an' bragged to Big Nell about his cache of dust, an' her an' Labonte planned the robbery an' rung the Kid in fer the goat."

CORPORAL DOWNEY drummed gently upon his desk top with his fingers. "It could have been that way," he said thoughtfully, "but like you said, we could never prove it on Labonte with the alibi he'd have."

"I didn't say no sech a damn thing," objected Black John. "What I said was that if you'd of ketched the Kid he couldn't of proved he was innocent."

"The gun would help a lot," mused Downey. "There's ain't but damn few forty-one guns. It would be interestin' to know if the Kid had a forty-one gun on him."

"I kin swear that he ain't," replied Black John. "He stayed with me in my cabin the night he spent on Halfaday, an' I went through his stuff while he slep'. There wasn't no gun there of any kind."

"Where's the Kid now?" asked Corporal Downey.

"I couldn't say," replied Black John. "But tomorrow noon he'll be right here in this office. I told him it was the only thing to do."

Downey frowned slightly. "An' I'll have to arrest him for that murder. An' if he ain't guilty, he'll sure be in a hell of a spot—with the evidence all agin him. If this job come off like you think, it's one of the dirtiest deals that was ever pulled."

"It does savor of onderhandedness," commented Black John. "But I don't think you'll be arrestin' the Kid tomorrow noon—onless jest to hold him fer a witness. He ain't so much to blame fer his part in the job."

"Not if your theory is right, he wouldn't be," admitted Downey. "But with the evidence what it is, I'll have to arrest him. There ain't nothin' else I could do."

"Well, of course I ain't no policeman," replied Black John, "but if I was, damned if I wouldn't go ahead an' arrest Labonte."

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The young officer shook his head. "There ain't a damn thing on him," he said, "except the Kid's unsupported story. An' that wouldn't never convict him."

"If we know'd where Labonte lived," suggested Black John, hopefully, "we might slip up there an' search his shack. If Labonte was an outdoors man I'd say he prob'ly would leave that dust where he cached it somewheres between Swanson's crick an' the mouth of Bonanza, when he showed the Kid only two thousan'. But he ain't. I'll bet he's moved it to his shack long before this, an' cached it there. There ort to be eighteen-thousan' dollars worth."

"The dust wouldn't prove nothin'," said Downey. "You can't identify dust in one case out of a thousan'."

"You could identify the gun, though. Like you said—there ain't but damn few forty-ones. An' there might possibly be somethin' else that would link him up with the job. I wonder where he lives?"

"Hell—I know where he lives all right. It's the first shack beyond them new lumber piles on down past the Palace. But I ain't got no right to bust in there an' search it, without I arrest him first."

"Well, arrest him, then. Hell's bells! You kin arrest him on suspicion, er fer questionin', er some sech tom-foolery like you've got to trump up accordin' to law. Arrest him an' fetch him on down to his shack, an' we'll search it, an' if we don't find nothin', you kin turn him loose. Cripes—on Halfaday we arrest 'em without no quibblin' if they even look like they wanted to commit a murder—an' if they're guilty we convict 'em, too."

Corporal Downey rose abruptly from his chair. "I'm goin' to do jest exactly as you suggested," he said. "It's a long shot. But if that Kid is innocent, we've got to do everything we can to give him a break. An' if he steps through that door tomorrow noon, it'll be damn near a cinch that he is innocent. A guilty man wouldn't dare to—at least not a punk like him. Come on—we'll go down to the Palace."

VII

LUKE LABONTE looked up with a start from scrutiny of his cards as Corporal Downey laid a hand on his shoulder. "Come on along," said the young officer curtly "I want to have a talk with you."

"What's this?" cried the gambler, flushing, "a pinch?"

"Call it that, if you want to."

"What are you arrestin' me for?" the man demanded.

Corporal Downey grinned bleakly. "I guess you could open the book most anywheres an' hit the right thing," he said. "Come on."

The advent of the trim young officer, followed by Black John had caused a momentary stir among the patrons of the Klondike Palace, which crystallized into a tense expectancy as he laid his hand on Labonte's shoulder. Bartenders and customers stared in silence, the dance hall piano was stilled as men and women crowded the wide arched doorway to stare at the tableau, and the players of faro and roulette paused in their play.

Cuter Malone, the infamous proprietor, stepped out from behind the bar, and faced the young officer. "You can't arrest a man without givin' him a reason," he scowled.

"No?" Downey eyed the gross figure coldly. "Well, jest one more word out of you, an' you'll come along, too. An' you'll get the same reason I give him."

Tense moments passed as the two stood facing each other. Then Cuter Malone turned abruptly away, and resumed his place behind the bar. In the Yukon men held healthy respect for the uniform of the Northwest Mounted Police.

There was swift movement at the crowded doorway of the dance hall as Big Nell elbowed her way through. She crossed swiftly to the table and stood beside Labonte as he rose from his chair. "You might bluff Cuter, Cop," she announced, "but you can't bluff me! What you takin' him for?"

"Murder," replied Downey, "if it'll ease

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yer mind any. An' you might as well come, too. It'll save comin' back after you later."

"Yer damn right I'll come," blazed the woman. "You might frame him—but you can't frame me. You wait till I get my hat an' cloak, an' I'll go 'long, all right. An' when the smoke blows away there'll be a dumb cop busted back into the ranks."

"Be sure you fetch clothes enough," grinned Downey, as the woman headed for the stairs. "The cells down to detachment gets kind of chilly of nights, even in summer."

"I'll have plenty fer the time I'll be stayin'," retorted the infuriated woman as the stair door slammed behind her.

She returned in a few moments and the two followed Black John to the street as Downey brought up the rear.

"Where the hell you goin'?" queried the woman, as Black John turned in the opposite direction from detachment.

"Down to Labonte's shack," replied Downey. "It ain't far."

"Would you mind tellin' me fer what particular murder yer arrestin' me?" asked Lebonte.

"Swanson's," replied the corporal gruffly. "The only one I know you're guilty of."

If the words had any effect it was lost in the darkness, as the four proceeded down the street.

"What's the shack got to do with it?" demanded the gambler with a sneering laugh. "S'pose I did have some dust cached there—which I wisht to God I had. Swanson's dust ain't the only dust on the Yukon. Er mebbe he had a different kind than other folks."

"Mebbe," agreed Downey. "We'll see."

Arriving at the shack Labonte raised the latch and pushed the door open.

"Don't keep it locked, eh?" Downey commented.

"Why the hell should I? There ain't nothin' in here anyone would steal."

"Not when we've got sech swell police as we have in Dawson," added Big Nell.

LABONTE accommodatingly lighted the bracket lamp and stepping aside, arrayed himself beside the woman. "There you are," he said, indicating the room with a sweep of the hand. "Go to it."

Black John stood silent in the doorway as Corporal Downey, beginning in one corner, meticulously examined the room, inch by inch. It was a single room board shack papered inside and out with tarpaper, which at no spot gave evidence of having been tampered with since it was put on, evidently the fall before. Bunk, stove, woodbox, and a low cheap dresser and washstand yielded nothing in the way of evidence, and his search concluded, Downey stood glancing helplessly about the room. Labonte and the woman sneered openly.

From the doorway Black John had followed the search with interest. He pointed toward a certain spot on the floor. "Take down the lamp, Downey, an' give a look at that there board—the one where the two of 'em stood when you first begun to hunt. The way the light ketches it from here, it looks like there ain't quite so much dirt in the cracks where it j'ines onto the other boards as what there is in the rest of the cracks of the floor. Mebbe I'm wrong, but it looks like that from here."

"Pull up the whole floor, if you want to," taunted Labonte, "jest so you nail it down agin when yer through."

Dropping to his knees, Corporal Downey examined the floor board minutely. "I believe you're right!" he exclaimed a moment later. "Find me somethin' to pry with. Here's some marks that look like this board had been pried up lately. They don't show unless you hold the light close."

"Here's an ax," offered Labonte, retrieving one from behind the wood box, and handing it to the officer.

Downey examined the bit of the tool, and carefully fitted it to some nearly invisible marks on the floor boards. "This yours?" he asked abruptly.

"Sure, it's mine," answered the gambler. "Hell—Swanson wasn't killed with an ax, was he?"

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The young officer did not reply as he inserted the bit between two floor boards and pried gently. The board lifted easily, as though it had recently been removed. Wrenching it free with his hands, Downey gave a grunt of triumph as he pointed into the aperture where a revolver and a nearly empty gold sack reposed on top of a pile of well stuffed little sacks of gold. One by one he removed the objects, laying them beside him on the floor as Labonte and the woman looked on with horror-widened eyes. "Twelve, thirteen, fourteen," he concluded, as he removed the last of the little sacks from the hole. "They'll run right around eighty ounces to the sack—an' that would figger about eighteen thousan' dollars in dust, an' Swanson lost twenty thousan', accordin' to what Old Bettles figgers. An' this here gun is a forty-one caliber—the same as Swanson was killed with."

"It's a damned lie!" screamed Labonte, his voice shrill with mingled terror and rage. "It's a plant. Yer framin' me—damn you! I never seen that dust."

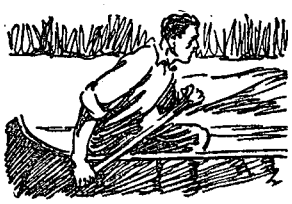
But Labonte's rage was as nothing compared to the flaming rage of Big Nell, as she turned blazing eyes upon the trembling gambler. "Framed, eh?" she shrieked. "A plant—you dirty double-crossin' shrimp! I'll say it's a plant. An' you planted it. Eighteen thousan' planted underneath yer floor, an' you told me all there was in Swanson's cache was two thousan'—an' you come acrost with a lousy seven hundred an' fifty fer my half, claimin' you give the Kid five hundred fer bein' lookout. An' there's my——"

"Shut up!" screamed Labonte. "You fool! You'll——"

"Yeah—I'll spill my guts an' tie a rope around your neck—you low-lived skunk! An' you'll have it comin'. I never wanted you to knock him off. I told you not to—but you was so damn smart with yer 'Dead men tell no tales.' Maybe dead men don't—but live women do—when they've been double-crossed by dirty yellow pups like you! I done all the plannin' on this job, an' if you'd listened to me an' played square with me, we'd of got away with it! But no! You're too damn smart—you murderin' hound! I framed the Kid with that fake rock robbery, so he'd have to help, an' if you'd planted that gun on him, an' that gold sack that Old Bettles give Swanson, like you claimed you did, nothin' in God's world would of saved him when the police caught him! But you're so damn crooked that you couldn't resist stealin' even my pistol an' that empty sack! You——"

"I did plant 'em on him!" shrieked Labonte. "I mean—I don't know what the hell yer ravin' about. Yer crazy as hell! You don't know what yer sayin'. I don't know a damn thing about any of it. I never killed Swanson."

THE woman threw back her head and laughed wildly. "Tell that to the judge," she scoffed. "Maybe he'll believe you, after he hears what I've got to say. Oh, I know, they'll get me, too—but not fer murder! Robbery, or accessory before



the fact, or whatever they call it. I'll plead guilty to that an' take my rap. My life in that damn dump of Malone's ain't so soft; maybe a few years in the pen will be a relief. There's two favors I'm goin' to ask of the judge, though. One is to turn the Kid loose fer his share in the job—he was forced in against his will. An' the other is not to railroad me off to the pen till after I've seen you hung! That is, if you don't die of fright before they spring the trap."

"Shut up!" cried Labonte, trembling like a leaf. "Make her shut her damn mouth,"

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he appealed to Downey. "She'll drive me bug-house—like she is, herself."

"She don't sound crazy to me," replied the young officer. "Only mad. God help a man when he runs foul of a woman like her."

"God help him if he runs foul of any woman," muttered Black John. "Onct she got started, she shore spilt a chinful."

VIII

AT EXACTLY noon the next day the Broncho Kid, accompanied by Owl Man, stepped through the doorway of the little office at detachment headquarters. With scarcely a glance toward Black John who was seated near the open window, he walked to the flat top desk behind which sat Corporal Downey.

"I hear yer huntin' me," he said in a low, steady voice, "fer the murder of that chechako. I've come to give myself up. I never done it."

Downey nodded. "Yeah, I know," he answered, looking the younger man squarely in the eyes.

"I was mixed up in the robbery, though," the Kid hurried on. "I'll tell you the straight of it."

"I've got all the facts," replied Downey. "I know jest exactly what come off—from the time Labonte started slippin' you money, till he had you right where he wanted you. Yer lucky to get off with yer life."

"I don't want nothin' agin me," said the Kid. "I'm ready to go to jail fer my part an' git it over. Not the murder—I never know'd there was a murder till Black John told me."

Corporal Downey shifted his gaze to the desk top. "There's no charges against you," he said. "I wouldn't like a young fellow to start out with a prison record. But if I was you I wouldn't go back to Cuter Malone's. It ain't no place fer a kid to be hangin' around. Keepin' that kind of company damn near stretched yer neck fer you."

"I hate Malone's!" exclaimed the Kid fervently. "I hate him an' his dump, an' everything about it. I worked there last winter, 'cause there didn't seem to be nothin' else to do. But I've learnt my lesson. I'm through."

"What you figurin' on doin'?" the officer asked.

"Why——" the Kid hesitated, "I—I ain't had time to figger. You see, I expected I'd have to do time fer—fer——"

"You won't have to do no time."

"Ain't you even holdin' me fer a witness?"

Downey shook his head. "No. I've got evidence enough on Labonte to hang ten men. I don't need your story. An' I don't see the use in makin' you get up on the stand an' admit before everyone that you was mixed up in a mess like that with such characters as Labonte an' Big Nell. It wouldn't do you no good. After this, if I was you, I'd be kind of careful who I run around with."

The Kid pointed toward Black John. "I'll go back up to Halfaday with him, then," he said. "He's the best friend I ever had. It was him made me come down here an' report to you. He's a square guy. Jest bein' around a man like him would make a fellow feel——"

BLACK JOHN'S chair scraped noisily upon the floor, and he cleared his throat violently. "You damn young fool!" he exclaimed, roughly. "Ain't Downey jest got through tellin' you to be careful who you run around with? I'm an outlaw! An' damn near everyone else on Halfaday is outlaws, too. An' here, with the words hardly out of Downey's mouth, yer claimin' you want to go up there amongst us. But you ain't goin'—by a damn sight. We ain't no folks fer you to be trottin' around with—jest like Downey told you. You stay away from Halfaday. If ever you show up on the crick, we'll hang you, shore as hell, fer skullduggery. You wait till tomorrow an' go see Camillo

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Bill. He offered to grubstake you. An' if you know what's good fer you, you throw in with them sourdoughs."

"But he prob'ly won't have nothin' to do with me now, after seein' me there at that crick."

"Mebbe not—now," retorted Black John dryly. "That's why I told you to wait till tomorrow. I'll have a little talk with him tonight—Downey, too."

The youngster's eyes blinked rapidly, and his voice sounded a bit husky as he turned toward the door. "Outlaw, er no outlaw," he said, "yer the squarest guy I ever seen. So long. I'll never fergit what you done fer me."

Long moments of silence followed the Kid's departure. Black John was the first to speak. "He's a good kid," he said gruffly. "He went back an' shot all them horses. That was good advice I give him—to stay off'n Halfaday—wasn't it, Downey?"

The young officer nodded slowly. "Yes, John," he said, "I suppose it was. But somehow—mebbe—if you'd taken him back with you—the—er—arrangement might have done you both good."

Black John shook his head. "Nope. If things was a little different—mebbe. But not on Halfaday. There's things comes up there sometimes that a kid like him shouldn't know about. Guess I'll go hunt up Camillo Bill."

As the big man moved toward the door, Corporal Downey slanted him a shrewd glance. "By the way, John," he said, "if I didn't know Labonte is guilty as hell, an' if we hadn't got what amounts to a confession out of him—an' if Big Nell hadn't busted loose with what she knew—I'd never have stood for that plant."

"Plant!" cried the big man, with well-feigned surprise. "What the hell do you mean?"

Downey shrugged and a tight-lipped grin whitened the corners of his lips. "Don't play me for a fool, John," he said. "That plant cost you plenty—but at that, I guess it was the only way the Kid could have been saved. I guess that sometime, if we ever run acrost an eighteen thousand dollar cache somewheres between Swanson's crick an' the mouth of Bonanza, we'd ought to return it to you."

"I don't know what the hell yer talkin' about," replied Black John. "But the half of it should go to Cush. Even if no one ever finds sech a cache, eighteen thousan' ain't sech a hell of an investment to make in a young fella like him. We got to remember them horses."

HOW MUCH A PINCH?

IN THE gold rush days, Sacramento was to the mining region what Johannesburg is to the Rand—a base of supplies, a place to spend your money. Those were the free and easy days when anything costing less than a dollar was priced in "bits," a bit having no arbitrary value, but being equivalent to the amount of gold dust which could be held between the thumb and forefinger. In the days when placer mining was in its glow, debts were discharged in gold dust instead of coin, and it often happened when a man was paying a small grocery bill—or more particularly when he was buying a drink—that the bartender, instead of taking the trouble of weighing the dust, would insert his thumb and forefinger in the miner's buckskin pouch and lift a pinch of gold dust. So it came to pass that a man's ability, on seeking a job as bartender, was tested by the proprietor asking, "how much can you raise at a pinch?" whence the familiar colloquialism of the present day. The more that he could raise the more valuable he would be as an employee, consequently, the chief requisite for a successful bartender was that he should have splay fingers.

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Among the Pearling Islands
Captain Dick Was Lucky
To Have a Friend

THE FRIEND OF CAPTAIN DICK

By MURRAY LEINSTER

Author of "Charley's Partner," "After Two Cigarettes," etc.

AN ANCIENT windjammer hove to off Ohui and a small boat put off from it and came ashore. Dan Smith stepped out onto the sand in spotless white ducks, led the boat's crew up to Thompson's place, and bought them exactly two drinks apiece. Then he firmly led them down to the boat once more. It headed out for the ship again. Dan Smith saw the windjammer, with its sails filled, move on toward the horizon. He stayed on Ohui. And that was that.

Ohui isn't a place people crave to go to, nowadays. Tourist steamers sometimes stop there, because there was a time when Ohui was famous for being very picturesque and very wicked. But those days have long since passed. Now Ohui is a glamorous, humid paradise and a reeking small edition of Gehenna by turns. The paradise appears when a round moon shines on miles of white beach, with surf booming heavily on the reef outside and palms waving and whispering in the trade-wind. The Gehenna appears by day. Then the shell and copra in the trade-sheds smells to high heaven, with other scents added to build up a full-sized effluvium. And of course there is a white-hot sun to fry a man's brains in his skull.

Dan Smith went into Thompson's place and arranged for a room. Then he asked questions about one Cap'n Dick Wilkins, retired skipper, who had been in these parts a couple of months before. The part-native girl smiled hopefully, but Dan Smith's air was businesslike. She gave up hope and said indifferently that Cap'n Dick had left Ohui on the *Dierdre,* Mike Fingall owner and master. Dan Smith looked out at the schooner rolling slowly at anchor off the beach. It was the *Dierdre.* Both its boats were ashore. He rubbed his chin meditatively and asked again. Mike Fingall was ashore somewhere. The part-native girl didn't know where.

Dan Smith nodded. He went up to the upper veranda to wait. He looked rather grim and wholly unromantic. The part-native girl sank back into apathy. Indifferent, herself, she could not see why anybody should care about a man as old as Cap'n Dick Wilkins. She resented Dan Smith's indifference to her. Then she went to sleep.

ON THE upper veranda, Dan Smith had a view which reached to the far edge of the world. He saw the sea, ineffably blue, and the long white beaches, and a riot of green stuff leading back to the

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hills inland. Ohui is volcanic. He saw the dozen white-man structures remaining of Ohui's ancient glory, and a sprinkling of native huts, and the wharves at which many pearlers and trading schooners used to lie, but which are rarely used nowadays. But all Ohui seemed to drowse.

Dan Smith waited. After a long time, with a startling suddenness a white man came out of the green stuff which began at the edge of the settlement. Mike Fingall. Dan Smith stirred. Mike Fingall strode across the most-used part of Ohui's single thoroughfare. Dust kicked up about him. By his expression, he was swearing wrathfully. He dived into the store of the Inter-Island Trading Company. His voice bellowed. There was a crash inside. An instant later, with another crash, the door burst open and a figure came hurtling out. Mike Fingall followed, bellowing.

From the veranda, Dan Smith watched the fight. The clerk of the Inter-Island store was as big a man as Mike Fingall himself, and he was well-built enough. It should have been a fairly even match. But he defended himself only feebly. He fought with the timorous desperation of a man who is thinking of what his antagonist is going to do to him, rather than of what he is going to do to his antagonist. In ten minutes he lay in the dust, snarling feebly, while Mike Fingall stood erect and roared down at him.

"Keep away from her, y'hear me?" he bellowed. "Else I'll cut off y'ears an' make ye eat 'em!"

Then he grinned. It was not a pleasant grin. He looked around for his audience, which was small. Dan Smith on the upper veranda. The manager of the Inter-Island store, come out calmly to see his assistant thrashed. The part-white girl of Thompson's place, two or three natives, watching disinterestedly. Mike Fingall grinned at all of them, not recognizing Dan Smith. He dusted himself, straightened his shoulders, and swaggered back toward the path along which he had come. He vanished.

Dan Smith rubbed his chin meditatively. He felt tentatively at his shoulder-holster. He went down the steps. He went across the dusty thoroughfare and plunged into the same path into which Mike Fingall had vanished.

A QUARTER of a mile through brush so thick as almost to be jungle. A half, with surf booming invisibly to his right. Voices out of the thick growth ahead.

". . . I beat him up!" roared Mike Fingall. "I'll do it again! . . ."

A girl's voice, too angry to be afraid: "Stand aside and let me pass!"

Mike Fingall laughed. Then Dan Smith heard a scuffling.

He went on. He came upon Mike Fingall with a white girl struggling in his grasp. Mike Fingall was grinning amusedly.

"Now listen," he said jovially, "Ye're goin' to marry me an' we'll go live on Napanapa. Better make up your mind to it."

Dan Smith said evenly:

"Stop it, Fingall."

Mike Fingall whirled. He saw and recognized Dan Smith.

"Now what the hell are you doin' here?" he growled.

"Looking for you," said Dan Smith.

"An' what for?"

"Cap'n Dick Wilkins," said Dan Smith succinctly. "Butting in now is just a sideline. But you'd better give the lady your gun, Fingall, else I'll think you intend to use it."

He was not impressive, face to face with Mike Fingall. Fingall was much the bigger man. But Dan Smith's hand hovered near a shoulder-holster. Mike Fingall growled, and wrathfully gave the girl his gun. Dan Smith deliberately passed over his own weapon to her.

"You're going to the settlement," he said briefly. "Leave this for me at the Inter-Island store, please."

The girl said bitterly:

"I'd rather you used it on him!"

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She went swiftly down the path. Mike Fingall glowered. Dan Smith waited until the girl was well away. Then he said quietly:

"Where's Cap'n Dick Wilkins, Fingall?"

"That old fool? How the hell should I know?"

"He sailed from here on your schooner," said Dan Smith. "He never arrived anywhere else. Didn't he talk to you about the *Amaryllis?*"

"The *Amaryllis?* I never heard of it," said Mike Fingall savagely.

"Liar," Dan Smith nodded. "There's no man in the islands hasn't heard of the *Amaryllis*. She went down, you remember, with nearly half a million in pearls in the skipper's safe. And there's always been a rumor that somebody got away—with the pearls. Cap'n Dick has been tracing down those rumors."

"He's crazy!" snarled Mike Fingall. "Plain crazy!"

"You didn't think so. He sailed on your boat on the way to see me. You didn't know he mailed me a letter before boarding the *Dierdre*."

Mike Fingall cursed suddenly.

"So—what's happened to him, Fingall? He's pretty old. Tough, but old. What did you do with him?"

Mike Fingall rumbled in his throat. Then he rushed, suddenly. Dan Smith stopped the rush with a right to the jaw. But the big man kept on rushing. These other rushes met other appropriate responses. In five minutes Dan Smith was carrying the fight to Mike Fingall. And as he whipped home lashing, stinging, savage blows, he panted:

"You're licked—but the licking keeps up till you tell what happened to Cap'n Dick! He's a friend of mine."

Mike Fingall first bellowed inarticulately, and then raged inarticulately, and at last panted inarticulately. But he did not answer. When he was quite senseless, Dan Smith looked down at him, frowning. Mike Fingall was practically a pulp. It was quite ten minutes before he opened one eye. One, because the other was tightly closed. That one glared balefully at Dan Smith.

"You didn't expect to be questioned," said Dan Smith grimly. "What did you do with Cap'n Dick?"

From thick, puffed lips came thick, bubbling profanity which conveyed no information whatever. Dan Smith shrugged, his eyes coldly upon the prostrate man.

"All right," he said evenly, "you're not too dense to realize that I'm going to keep working on you, are you?"

II

THIS was day-time, when Ohui is a small edition of Gehenna. Dan Smith emerged from the shadowy jungle and blinked at the glaring sunlight. Cap'n Dick Wilkins had vanished, but beforehand he'd mailed a letter to Dan Smith explaining in ever-youthful enthusiasm that he was at last on the trail of the *Amaryllis'* safe. The old chap puttered about the Islands continually now, on the trail of buried treasure.

Too old to handle a schooner of his own, there was yet no schooner-skipper who would refuse him passage wherever he wished to go. Besides, Cap'n Dick wasn't a beachcomber. He had always a few dollars in his pocket from some mysterious source. And he'd taken passage on the *Dierdre*—and he'd vanished. Right after coming upon what he thought was the authentic trail of the *Amaryllis'* safe.

Dan Smith, frowning in the sunlight, said angrily, of Mike Fingall:

"But he ought to be hunting it, instead of hanging around."

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He went through the powdery dust to the Inter-Island store. He climbed to the porch and went in. A startlingly pretty girl turned sharply and said "Oh!" as if in alarm. The clerk—the one Mike Fingall had beaten—cringed before he realized that this was not Fingall.

"I'll take my gun, please," said Dan Smith. "Thank you."

The girl handed it to him, searching his face for marks of battle.

"Did you—fight him?" she asked. "I didn't thank you before for interfering. I do now."

"A pleasure," said Dan Smith. "I owed him a licking. Maybe more. I wonder—" he looked at the clerk—"I wonder if you can tell me one or two things?"

"Of course!" said the girl warmly. "I'm Lucy Haven. He's Ted Gerard. Of course he'll tell you. He's as grateful to you as I am."

Ted Gerard did not look quite so grateful. But then, a young man who has failed signally to thrash an obnoxious rival will never be really grateful to somebody else who has succeeded.

"I'm trying to find a friend of mine," said Dan Smith. "An old fellow, all of seventy. Cap'n Dick Wilkins. He was here two months ago. I'd like to know what's happened to him. You knew him?"

"There was an old beachcomber around," said Ted Gerard, without undue enthusiasm. "I suppose he's your man. He hung around a while and then Mike Fingall took him off on the *Dierdre*."

Dan Smith said evenly:

"He was my friend. Not a beachcomber. Did he talk about treasure?"

"I didn't pay much attention to him," said Ted Gerard shortly.

"I did," said the girl. "He was an old darling. So whiskery! And so active and spry for his age! I was here waiting for a schoooner to take me back to Napanapa. He told me I shouldn't live on a lonely place like that. I ought to sell it. He said he'd find me a purchaser at a good fat price so I could fold my hands in my lap and live like a grand lady."

"Napanapa?" said Dan Smith sharply. "You own that?"

The girl nodded.

"My father planted it. He died last year. I'm still waiting for a schooner to go back on. There are laborers and a native overseer there now."

Dan Smith looked at her keenly.

"Did Cap'n Dick ever mention the *Amaryllis* to you?"

"No. Never," said the girl. "Is it a ship?"

"It was," said Dan Smith dryly, "and I was the purchaser he talked about." He rubbed his chin. "This Mike Fingall. Cap'n Dick sailed on his schooner. Mike Fingall used to think himself rather a bad egg."

"He's no good anyhow," said Ted Gerard resentfully. "A bruiser, that's all. No brains. He can't even get credit for supplies, any more. And he's been hanging around and trying to get Lucy to marry him, so he can live on her money."

DAN SMITH listened. The girl looked at him curiously.

"Did you beat Mike Fingall badly?" she asked hopefully.

"Rather," said Dan Smith abstractedly. "He did need it."

This girl was very pretty. She looked at Dan Smith with admiring, shining eyes. Then she grew angry again.

"He's a beast," she said passionately. "A beast! He says he wants to marry me. But all he cares about is Napanapa. He wants that! And—I'm engaged to Ted, here, and he fights Ted every time Ted speaks to me. He wins, too."

Ted said sullenly:

"I'm no bruiser."

"He must have somebody paid to watch," added Lucy indignantly, "because every time Ted comes to the missionary's where I'm staying, Mike Fingall turns up and fights with Ted. Now we meet outside, so he won't know."

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Dan Smith did not quite admire Ted Gerard, as a man who would conceal his meetings with a girl, through fear of being beaten up by a rival. He said, "Thanks for what you've told me," and went out. But he looked twice at Lucy before he left.

The sun glowed white-hot, outside. The beaches glared incandescent. The sea flung a myriad sun-glitters into his eyes and the lush green of the bush seemed fairly to radiate heat. But Dan Smith did not drowse. He had things to think about. Cap'n Dick Wilkins, seemingly friendless, vanishing while on Mike Fingall's schooner —right after becoming convinced he was on the trail of the safe of the *Amaryllis* containing half a million dollars in pearls. Cap'n Dick was at an age when a man may alternate between being very close-mouthed or very garrulous indeed. And his letter to Dan Smith had named Napanapa.

Sitting again on the upper veranda, Dan Smith saw Mike Fingall drag himself down to the settlement. He heard the uproar as he routed out members of his crew and had himself rowed out to the *Dierdre*. Later—near sundown—that boat came ashore again. It put off once more with certain bundles in it. Supplies. And Dan Smith had provisioned schooners himself. He could guess just how many days that boat-load of supplies would feed the crew of a schooner like the *Dierdre*. Since Mike Fingall had no credit, he must have paid cash for these. He was going to leave Ohui. About time.

Bearing in mind the size of the load of provisions, Dan Smith began to run over in his mind the charts of the waters about Ohui. Napanapa, two hundred and fifty miles to northward. A plantation, with native laborers and an overseer. Pauhiki, only twenty miles away, thickly populated and visited from time to time by the missionary from Ohui. The only other place within the limits set by those supplies was Rupari, which was a bare speck on the largest-scale chart, and was down in the Pilot as having only fifteen or twenty cocoanut trees, practically no water, and very bad landing. None of these was plausible as a port for Mike Fingall to stay at. And he had no cargo or trade-goods.

Dan Smith looked twice at his watch. Then a voice hailed cautiously from the darkness. His hand hovered close to his shoulder holster until the Inter-Island clerk, Ted Gerard, came furtively up on the veranda.

"You said," he said uncomfortably, "that you were the man Cap'n Wilkins was talking about as a buyer for Napanapa."

"Yes," agreed Dan Smith. "I am. I own two or three atolls."

Ted Gerard drew a deep breath.

"I'd like to persuade Lucy to sell Napanapa," he explained hopefully. "We're going to be married, but it would be deadly dull there. If she got a good price for the place, we could go to Nauva or Tahiti and start off in business with a good capital."

Dan Smith made a non-committal noise.

"So," said Ted Gerard, "I wish you'd come along and talk to her. I'm going to meet her on the beach, tonight. The missionary's over on Pauhiki and his wife's with him. Lucy's afraid of a row at the house, if Mike Fingall comes and finds me there. I'll tell her," he added, "that you came along in case of trouble with him."

Dan Smith said without expression:

"I think he's going to sail, tonight. I want to see him again before he does."

"You'll have time," Ted assured him. "His crew's to meet him at the landing-place at midnight. The tide changes then."

The tide, on an island like Ohui, is a matter of remarkably slight importance. On an atoll it matters, on Ohui it simply does not. Dan Smith considered and his eyes gleamed a little.

"All right, I'll come. But I must be back before Mike Fingall sails. And there's another matter——"

"What?"

"Your fiancée," said Dan Smith dryly, "is a very pretty girl. Too good for you. I might try to get her to marry me!"

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Ted Gerard laughed relievedly. He plainly considered that idea so absurd as to be intentionally humorous.

THE two of them went through the soft darkness to the beach.

"The best argument for Lucy," explained Ted Gerard absorbedly, "is how much better off we'd be. A man wouldn't have a chance to do anything on Napanapa. It's just a hole I'd be buried in. But in Nauva or Tahiti, with capital behind me, I'd get somewhere. I could——"

Dan Smith listened without comment. They moved together along the wide beach, with the surf booming on the reef and gurgling more gently on the sand's edge. The moon came up presently, and the beach became pure granulated silver.

And after a little, Lucy stepped out of the thick growth where the beach ended. And moonlight, everywhere, lends beauty to any woman. On Ohui there are romantic palms and booming surf and the near bright tropic stars to make a background which lends more beauty still. And Lucy Haven had been good to look at in the glaring hot light of day, when Ohui is Gehenna. Here in the shadowy, glamorous darkness she was more than beautiful.

The three of them sat on the beach and talked. That is, Ted Gerard talked. Volubly. Explaining why Lucy should sell Napanapa. Preferably to Dan Smith. He told in detail exactly how he could take the selling-price of Napanapa and become an important figure in Nauva or Tahiti.

Dan Smith looked at Lucy. There was moonlight in her hair.

With his face puffy from the beating of that day, Ted Gerard explained the danger of Lucy living on Napanapa, with Mike Fingall desirous of her beauty and needing her income to keep his schooner afloat. He pointed out that, even married, Lucy would not be safe.

Dan Smith had not come here to listen to day-dreams, but because his hunt for Cap'n Dick Wilkins called for him to be where Mike Fingall was most likely to appear. He was all altertness for footsteps or rustlings in the bush, but meanwhile he continued to look at Lucy. The flesh of her throat was soft and smooth. She glanced at him. Ted Gerard talked.

He returned absorbedly to the exact use he would make of the selling-price of Napanapa, used as capital somewhere else. To have capital behind him was his day-dream, as it is of most young men. He did not notice that Dan Smith and Lucy were looking at each other in the moonlight, now. And Lucy's eyes were puzzledly intent, as if she were seeing something which at once interested her intensely and caused a queer astonishment.

Then, suddenly, Dan Smith realized that the younger man had ceased to talk. He was looking uneasily from one to the other of them.

"Well?" he demanded defensively. "Don't you think I'm right?"

Dan Smith shook himself, and remembered Cap'n Dick Wilkins.

"No," he said harshly. "Since you ask, I think you're a fool—and I'm afraid you'd made me act like a fool, too!"

III

OHUI was still a paradise when Dan Smith went back along the beach. The surf boomed and roared nearby, and all along the reef the dull and thunderous sound rose heavily. But Dan Smith moved hurriedly, swearing under his breath because he'd let his mind become absorbed in Lucy. There was the matter of Cap'n Dick still to be attended to. Vanishing, just after he was sure he'd located half a million in treasure. Dan Smith scowled. He'd made one big mistake. Mike Fingall knew about Cap'n Dick's discovery, and he had a schooner he couldn't keep in supplies. And there was Napanapa. Beaten up as Mike Fingall had been, he should have acted in one certain, specific fashion because the man who'd beaten him was looking for Cap'n Dick. And he hadn't acted in that fashion.

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Dan Smith had waited till the last minute. Now he went swiftly down the beach until the lights of Thompson's place came into view. He searched for Fingall's schooner. He saw it, in the moonlight. He hurriedly stripped to shorts and shoulder-holster and went into the water. He swam fast, at first, and after that with as much speed as he dared considering the phosphorescence of the water. The lights of Ohui dwindled. Presently he saw the dark masts of the schooner rocking amid the stars. He changed course and swam more cautiously. When he reached the bobstays, he hung on and listened intently for a long time. And he heard nothing but the washing of waves against the hull.

He pressed his ear against the planking. No sound of movement, save the squeaking of the ship's timbers from her swaying.

After a little, he climbed up and swung over the forward rail. No light. No movement. No sound. Dan Smith seemed startled. Almost alarmed. He suddenly abandoned caution and searched the schooner. There was not a soul on board. And it was well after midnight.

He was hesitating as if about to swim back to shore, when he heard the sound of oars. He listened, with the trade-wind thudding in his ears. He became sure. His teeth gleamed in the moonlight and he went quietly forward and slipped over the side again. He was once more floating, holding on to the bobstay chains, when the schooner's boat came alongside. It made contact. Mike Fingall's voice, savagely triumphant, came to Dan Smith's ears. He hoisted a heavy bundle to the deck. Another. One of the bundles made noises. Mike Fingall swung up, ordered the bundles carried below, and snarled orders to his crew.

Dan Smith waited while the anchor came dripping to the bows; while the sails went up; as the *Dierdre* first paid off, then caught the breeze and forged ahead. He did not climb over the rail a second time until the schooner was clear of the reef and lurching in the heavier, longer offshore swells.

Then he swung over purposefully—and gazed into the horror-struck eyes of one of the Kanaka crew, who doubtless thought him a ghost-devil of a particularly malevolent sort. Dan Smith encouraged the notion by knocking him cold.

Then he went aft. Mike Fingall was in the act of giving rage-thickened directions to the helmsman. Dan Smith's revolver materialized in the binnacle-glow. Mike Fingall goggled at him.

"By the orders you just gave," said Dan Smith pleasantly, "you're headed for Rurapi. Cap'n Dick Wilkins is there, then, isn't he?"

Mike Fingall made inarticulate sounds. The gun-muzzle stayed steady.

"I didn't think you'd killed him," said Dan Smith, "because you didn't have a yarn ready to tell when you were asked. Stupid as you are, Fingall, you'd have prepared for that if you'd killed him. But hunting for treasure, you'd hesitate to kill him anyway. You might need more information."

HE TWITCHED Mike Fingall's gun away and threw it overboard.

"I'm guessing," he observed, "that Cap'n Dick's information was convincing but indefinite. So you thought you might have to do a lot of digging. Which meant supplies, at least. And you couldn't get supplies on credit. But the *Amaryllis'* safe was on Napanapa, and Lucy Haven owned Napanapa, and she had credit. So you

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tried to marry her credit, and the atoll, so you could dig up those pearls. But then I butted in, hunting for Cap'n Dick Wilkins. Which meant you had to move, and move fast. Give orders for your two prisoners to be turned loose, Fingall."

Mike Fingall strangled over helpless rage. Dan Smith gave the order himself. It was obeyed. His revolver was convincing. And in two minutes Lucy put her head up through the cabin hatch and—very pale—said down into the darkness below:

"It's all right to come up, Ted. He's here."

By which she did not refer to Mike Fingall. She came on deck and smiled shakily at Dan Smith. He gave her his revolver.

"Take this. Use it if you need to. I'm going to work on Fingall a bit and then send him ashore.

But Mike Fingall rushed suddenly. There are limits, even to fear, when a man is sufficiently enraged. Fingall roared—and Dan Smith landed on his jaw. Then the moonlight played upon a second battle between the two men, which was hardly a battle at all. Fingall bellowed and fought crazily. Dan Smith fought in an icy coldness, with queer shadows from the sails and rigging playing upon his bare skin. The schooner, untended, wabbled on her course and came up all standing while Dan Smith's fists lashed in and out. He seemed to feel a more personal venom, this time, than before, and when Mike Fingall was lowered into one of the *Dierdre's* boats he had almost been cut to ribbons by Dan Smith's fists.

"He'll make it back to Ohui all right," said Dan Smith coldly. "I need this boat. He marooned Cap'n Dick Wilkins on Rupari and I'm going after him. Cap'n Dick's seventy, but he's a friend of mine."

"We're—going to Rupari then?" asked Lucy. It was her first word.

Dan Smith nodded. Ted Gerard said uneasily:

"But—we can't do that! There's Lucy's reputation——"

"The missionary of Ohui is on Pauhiki," said Dan Smith. "We pass it in the morning. I'll heave to."

Ted Gerard sputtered. Lucy said rather unsteadily:

"You beat—Fingall terribly. He deserved it. But I don't understand why he kidnapped Ted. He met us on the way from the beach——"

"And knocked him cold," said Dan Smith. "So he could threaten to kill him, if necessary to persuade you. You see, Fingall's a fool. He marooned Cap'n Dick because Cap'n Dick believed he'd found proof the *Amaryllis'* safe was on Napanapa. He wrote me about it, and he confided in Fingall—and Fingall marooned him to try to get it for himself. There's supposed to be half a million in pearls in the *Amaryllis'* safe."

"On Napanapa? Buried?" said Ted Gerard sharply.

"So Cap'n Dick believed, and so he confided to Fingall."

"Then," said Ted Gerard eagerly, "we'll settle down on Napanapa and dig it up, Lucy. We'll find it! Look here, we'll stop at Pauhiki in the morning, get married, and go right on——"

Dan Smith smiled rather grimly to himself, with the marks of battle still upon him and moonlight beating down through the rigging.

"Cap'n Dick," he said gently, "is seventy. He staked me when I hadn't a friend in the world. But he's seventy."

"Owning Napanapa," went on Ted Gerard gleefully, "nobody can dig without your permission, Lucy. We'll get it. We'll have half a million for capital on Nauva. That means starting off in a big way! I'll double that in a year. That's a chance for a man, Lucy!"

Lucy looked intently at Dan Smith.

"Go on," she said. "I think I see, Cap'n Dick—and he's an old darling—wants so badly to do something important even if he's old."

"Yes," said Dan Smith dryly. "He does.

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And he forgets. The *Amaryllis* was found all of fifteen years back. The safe, too. Cap'n Dick forgets. He's seventy."

Lucy smiled at Dan Smith.

"And you came to hunt him up, not to get a treasure, but because he was an old man, and in trouble, and your friend. I—like that!"

Ted Gerard was absorbed in his own thoughts.

"That's what we'll do, Lucy!" he said decisively. "We'll get married in the morning and go straight to Napanapa. With half a million capital behind me——"

Dan Smith turned his head and looked at Lucy. For a little space there was no sound but the sough of wind in the rigging and the sound of the waves overside. There was a very bright moon overhead, and many bright and near-seeming stars. The moonlight shone on Lucy's face. She still smiled at Dan Smith.

"Come here and stand beside me," he said gruffly.

She joined him at the wheel. Their fingers interlaced on the spokes. She looked up at him, utterly content. Ted Gerard said impatiently:

"You understand, Lucy? With half a million capital behind me, I can start out in a big way."

Then Dan Smith said dryly:

"No. She doesn't understand. We stop at Pauhiki tomorrow, yes. And there's a wedding. But it isn't yours. It's mine. Then we go on for Cap'n Dick. He's a friend of mine."

Lucy nodded, regarding Dan Smith with utter confidence. She agreed with every word he said.

MOTHER TONGUE

Harold Willard Gleason

BITTS, binnacle and bonnets, booms and braces,
Bunts, bulwarks, bulkhead backstays, broaching to,
Chucks, cringle, crojick—how the fancy races!
Such terms recall the gleam of surges blue
Rushing white-crested, curling past the coaming
As, decks aslant, tall vessels put to sea,
Dipping brave bows, astern their bright wakes foaming,
Aloft all canvas drawing, shore a-lee.
Just as the homesick wanderer's heartstrings quiver
When syllables familiar reach his ear,
So must a sailor's pulses leap whenever,
Landlocked, he chances once again to hear
Strange salty names that summon from the vast
Dear poignant memories of wheel-tricks past.

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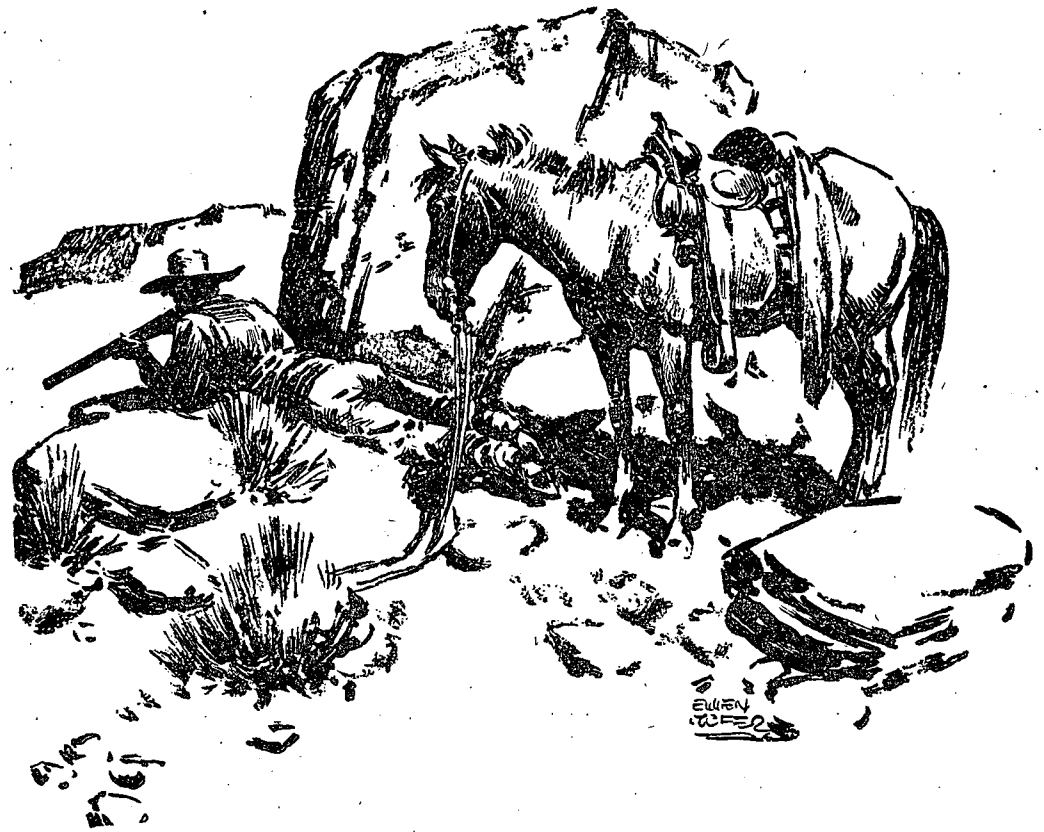
Sheriff Dan Delaney Knew a Lot about Horseshoes and Hunches, and Was to Learn a Great Deal More



THE SHERIFF OF TWO BUTTES

By G. W. BARRINGTON

Author of "Dawg Tracks," "Battle in the Bad Lands," etc.

I

HORSESHOES AND HUNCHES

SHERIFF DAN DELANEY looked out of the northeast window of the ramshackle wooden courthouse and scowled darkly. Delaney was young, amiable, cheerful and wont to smile upon his fellow-men; but somehow he never could bring himself to look upon Wolf Bullard as a fellow-man.

Not that Delaney ever had had anything tangible against Wolf Bullard, officially. Wolf simply grated upon the sheriff's nerves, which just now were unstrung to some extent, anyway.

EARLY in Delaney's first term, trouble had commenced riding the Two Butte range—trouble that threatened to defeat the young officer for re-election. Seven major crimes in rapid succession had gone unsolved. Then, by as shrewd a bit of detective work as any prairie officer ever performed, Delaney brought his man to bag. There had been peace for a time—luckily lasting past election day. Then, as though taking a leaf from his predecessor's book,

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a second masked bandit had commenced terrorizing the community. Delaney had grown thin and haggard in the fruitless pursuit of a merciless outlaw who always killed his victims, after having robbed them—killed them either through sheer cruelty, or from a deep-seated belief in the old axiom, "dead men tell no tales."

Delaney had ridden Pete, his big, free-going sorrel gelding almost out. He had searched the creek country north of town and the rock washes north and west of there. He had worried his mind and sought advice from his friends and passed sleepless nights and gone dinnerless—and with positively no results.

The stage had been robbed twice, the driver being killed in each instance. Attorney Madison had been bound and tortured in his own home, then wantonly killed after having divulged the combination of his office safe—as indicated by the fact that the safe had been found open and unmarred.

The savings of a lifetime of toil which Widow Bender kept in a fruit jar in her pantry had not been great, but they had proved a sufficient lure for the robber, who did not hesitate to murder the frail old woman. Big, bluff Bill Jennings, rancher, had been found on a vacant lot back of the *Elite* saloon, with his pockets turned out and his head bashed in. A heavy winning at poker had proved his undoing.

Delaney had no clue, no cause to suspect any particular person. But he didn't like Wolf Bullard, and somehow he had gradually come to connect Wolf Bullard with the series of outrages. It was an intangible suspicion, and in his innermost heart Delaney was prone to admit that it might be an unjust one, arising from the fact that he disliked Bullard, and was aware that Bullard hated him. It was true too that, though Delaney had kept a close watch on Bullard and never failed to check his movements after a fresh crime, Bullard had had a clean bill. Also Delaney knew that Wolf Bullard was aware that he was suspected, and, if guilty, would step carefully.

Mental and moral opposites, the sheriff and Bullard had but one thing in common; they both loved a good horse, and each of them had a good horse.

AND now, just as Delaney was wracking his brain for a solution of his puzzle, Wolf Bullard had dawned on his vision in the act of dismounting in front of the Swede Sorenson's general store, diagonally across the sandy, sun-cooked street that surrounded the triangle of despondent brown sward on which the courthouse stood.

Glowering, Delaney looked the man over, finding nothing to commend. The big, loose frame was carried with a slouchy, indolent air that gave no hint of the tremendous physical prowess and stamina the man was known to possess. The skull was round, the forehead low, jutting and furrowed. The ever-open mouth wore a set grin showing over-sized white fangs that had earned him the sobriquet, "Wolf." The eyes were small, pale and practically expressionless, like the eyes of a dead fish. They never showed a glint of human feeling, or recorded a single one of Wolf's inner thoughts. He just went among his fellows, always smiling that set cynical smile. When he came in from his untidy ranch, fifteen miles west of town, he bought his supplies, drank moderately, played a little poker and went back to his Indian wife—Indian woman, at least, without having met a friend or attempted to make one.

Today, Wolf had brought the Indian woman along. After she had dismounted and tied her saddleless roan Oregon mare, and he had led his big gray gelding into Bill Simpson's blacksmith shop, which sat a little way back from the board walk, and between the Swede's store and the saloon, Wolf growled some surly order at the woman and she stalked into the store. With Delaney watching him for no particular reason, Wolf visited the post-office, then the saloon. A few minutes later, he emerged and went into Harry Whitmore's pool-hall farther down the block, where he wouldn't be at all welcome. Harry was

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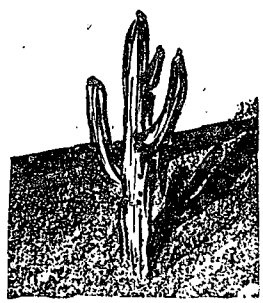
the sheriff's brother-in-law, and loyally hated Wolf on Delaney's account.

"Damn you," Delaney remarked, as Wolf's bulky figure disappeared through the screen door, "you're the only man in the world that I hate. I ac'shully hope you're crooked, 'cause if you are, I'll catch up with you sooner or quicker."

"Better be sooner, from what I'm hearin' aroun' town."

Ed Castor, Delaney's gangling, droop-mustached deputy had entered quietly by the side door. Ed was an eternal pessimist whose favorite pastimes were gathering and dispensing death-bed news and attending funerals.

"Whatsa matter now, you mournful-eyed salamander?" Delaney asked, turning away from the window, a little ashamed to know that his ruminations had been overheard.



Ed's dour look deepened and his voice became sepulchral. "I hate t' hurt your feelin's, but my duty is plain. Mebbe you ain't heard that th' boys is gittin' ready t' organize a——"

"Yeah, I know," Delaney cut him off, shrugging his withy shoulders and heaving his six-feet-two of bone and sinew out of his squeaky swivel chair. "Th' boys is agitatin' a plan to lace up a vigilance committee, an' kinda take charge of things."

"Well, let 'em. I gotta admit that they got plenty of reason. If we can't do anything we ain't got much kick if somebody else tries."

The sheriff emphasized the "we" slightly. "Count me out," Ed said lugubriously. "I know when I got enough. As yur head dep'ty, I'm hereby tenderin' my resignation, an'——"

"Shucks!" Delaney slapped the deputy heartily on his bony back. "Your calendar must be outa whack, Ed. You hand in your weekly resignation on a Thursday, most usual, an' this is only Tuesday. I'm afraid you're gonna keep droolin' at th' mouth till I decide that you can't live anyhow, so I may as well take you out an' shoot you, t' put you outa your mis'ry. Huh! What do we care if dozen of them wash-country soreheads organizes an'——"

"But mebbe you ain't heard who's gonna head 'em," Ed broke in, shaking his black mane dolefully.

"Who's th' geezer? Not that I'm interested, particular, but you won't leave me be till I let you tell it."

"Wal, it's Wolf Bullard, that's who it is. Also, I'm thinkin' that it's th' first gun in Wolf's campaign t' run you outa office. You know they was talkin' some of runnin' 'im against you, las' time."

"Yeah, talkin' some, but they didn't have the guts t' do it." The sheriff malleted Ed's back lightly again and gave him a push toward the door. "Hustle out an' serve them jury summonses, ol' hoss. An' quit scrougin' away frum shadders. We're still doin' th' sheriffin' aroun' here."

But after Ed had shambled out, enveloped in the funereal air that always surrounded him, Delaney gazed out of the window for a long, long time, muttering, "Damn," at five-minute intervals.

The organization of a vigilance committee would constitute a direct blow at his prestige, and no one knew that better than he did. His only come-back was to clean things up so effectively that no vigilance committee would be necessary.

THE sultry summer day wore on. Delaney pottered about his musty office, doing the thing he hated most—book work. By mid-afternoon, he had made out his monthly fee report, and was free from onerous office tasks. By that time the little cowtown had commenced to bustle

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with its customary business activity. Evidently having completed her trading, Wolf Bullard's squaw packed her purchases on her horse, then sat down on the edge of the heat-blistered pine walk, patiently awaiting further orders from her master. Bullard passed there several times, paying no more attention to her than to a clod in the road.

Delaney had carried his report across the gloomy hall to the county clerk's office and was returning to his own den, when Ed Castor came pussy-footing in, looking a little more disconsolate than usual—if possible. "Better ooze over t' th' blacksmith shop," the deputy advised. "First thing yuh know four-five men is gonna git kilt a plenty over thar."

"Only four or five?" Delaney grinned. But he tilted on his big pearl-gray hat and obeyed the hint. Experience had taught him that Ed Castor was right, occasionally.

Midway across the sun-glared street, the sheriff quickened his pace when sounds of altercation filtered from the blacksmith shop. He recognized the voices as belonging to Bill Simpson, the smith, and Wolf Bullard. As he heaved his tall form from the street to the walk, he heard Bullard's throaty growl, "I don't give a damn what yuh say, I ain't gonna be helt up that-a-way. I'm payin' two bucks, even; that'll be all."

"Yuh'll pay two-fifty, or yuh don't git yuh hoss," Simpson answered in a voice that quavered a little, but still was determined. "I ain't huntin' no trouble, but I gotta charge ev'ry feller alike. Yuh owe extry fur——"

"Th' hell with that. I'm takin' my hoss. If I have to take yur hide, too, I'll——"

"Whatsa trouble?" Delaney inquired, stepping inside.

"Don't remember that anybody sent fur you," growled Wolf, who had one hand on the gray's rein, and was jingling some silver in the other. "Ain't no trouble that I knows of—leastwise, none that's gonna 'mount t' a damn.

"This sooty-bellied cuss is a-tryin' t' holt me up. Ain't nobody gonna wah-hoo me that-a-way. I usta shoe hosses myself. If he bothers me much more I'm gonna chaw 'is ears off an'——"

"I ain't holdin' nobody up," Bill Simpson cut in, wiping his sweaty face on a corner of his leather apron and maintaining his hold on the gelding's other rein. "All I want's what's comin' to me, an' I'm plumb willin' t' let you settle it, fair an' squar' 'tween man an' man."

"Well, I ain't no jury, but I reckon I can arbitrate a little fuss like this here," Delaney offered. "As I asked a bit ago, what's it all about?"

"He shod my hoss all aroun', an' I'm payin' two bucks fur it," Wolf offered, his big white fangs appearing to show more than usual.

"But he ordered special rollin' motion shoes in front, an' I had to maul 'em out by hand," Simpson defended. "Here, I'll show yuh." The smith picked up one of the gelding's forefeet. "See? Rollin' motion taper I had to put on 'em. Took me anyways twice as long as common shoes, an'——"

DELANEY looked at the job with the keen interest of a practical horseman. "Looks good, Bill," he approved, then turned to Wolf. "Didn't know that hoss was rough-gaited any. I always thought he was as smooth a mover as I ever laid eyes on."

"He's free enough when he gits t' ramblin'," Wolf agreed, "but I'm breakin' 'im in t' fox-trot. He dubs 'is toes some when he tries it—don't break over quite square in front. Thought if I rolled 'im over some that-a-way, it'd help 'im till he gits th' hang of it.

"I ain't kickin' on th' job done. But two bucks shoes a hoss all aroun' in this man's country, an' I ain't never paid a thin dime more."

"Well, yuh will this time," Bill insisted stubbornly. "I hammered them shoes outa spring steel, an' it took me——"

"Hell," Delaney interrupted disgustedly,

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"two growed-up humans jawin' acrimonious 'bout a measly little ol' four bits. Leave go that rein, Bill. Give 'im them two bucks, Wolf."

Grinning in the manner that had earned him his nickname, Bullard tossed the coins to the smith who accepted them with evident reluctance. He grinned in turn, though, when the sheriff drew half a dollar from his own pocket and rang it down on the anvil. "There, that finishes payin' yuh bill, Wolf. Now take that hoss outa here, an' stop this jaw-whackin' right where it is."

The hyena grin on Wolf's dark face faded, and his pale eyes glinted. He glared at the sheriff for a moment so fiercely that Delaney stiffened and dropped a hand toward his holster, his keen, steel-blue eyes commencing to warm.

"Huh," Wolf grunted after a time, then jerked the inoffensive gray around and started out. As he started the horse up the plank incline that led to the walk, he hurled back over a burly shoulder, "Our sheriff's turned inta a four-bit judge, eh?

"That's plenty right, at that. He ain't no 'count for nawthin' else."

Delaney followed to the walk, his voice dangerously cool. "I'm advisin' you t' put a curb-bit on that tongue o' yourn, Wolf."

"An' I'm advisin' yuh t' hustle out an' round up a robber or two, 'stead o' snoopin' aroun' town buttin' in on other folks' business," Wolf came back defiantly.

Delaney felt his cheeks burn. He took a quick step forward, then halted and turned back.

There it was again. The trouble was that Wolf had spoken the truth. He really ought to hustle out and round up the robber.

But how? When? Where to start?

Damn!

Delaney still was standing in the doorway of the smoky old shop half an hour later, when Wolf Bullard jogged past on his homeward way, the Indian woman following like a trained hound. Delaney watched them out of sight along the white westward trail, then went into the Elite and drank three whiskeys in rapid succession. Then the sheriff returned to his office and sulked there until nightfall, when he started for home leaving the town in charge of Ed Castor, with instructions to "hang aroun' an' keep an eye on things till th' saloon closes."

II

THAT NIGHT

REACHING the tidy little ranch-house at the east edge of town where he lived with his mother and young wife, Delaney watered Pete and started to uncinch the saddle, then changed his mind. Instead, he hung the bridle on the horn and went to the little white cottage, after puting oats and hay into Pete's manger. He had intended to treat himself to a quiet evening at home; but as usual of late he couldn't bring himself to do it. He knew of nothing in particular that he could do; but it simply was impossible for him to smoke and read quietly at home when a cloud of uneasiness bordering on terror overhung the community.

While they were eating, there was the customary evening argument. Reinforced by Mother Delaney, the sheriff's wife tried vainly to make him promise not to go out. He couldn't out-argue them, of course, but he managed to effect a compromise by arranging to stay home until nine, then lope up town for a quick look around.

When he got ready to leave, another mild argument arose. On opening the kitchen door, he discovered that a light rain was falling and came back for his slicker. Mother Delaney thumped him on the head with her thimble and sternly ordered him to stay in out of it. The wife backed up the mother. Delaney bear-hugged them in turn and promised to be back as soon as he had taken a little look-see. Then he got out his horse and jogged through the gloom to the head of Main Street.

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The business section was practically deserted when the sheriff turned Pete's blazed muzzle out of the trail into the thoroughfare. A block away on his left, red light banked under the awning of the pool-hall showed that Harry Whitmore still was on the job. A little way further on, the front of the Elite glowed also. With the exception of a dim light showing through the basement window of the courthouse, over on the right, the rest of the town lay unseen in the murk.

Jogging between a double row of ghostly false-fronted buildings that became dimly visible as he passed each one in turn, the sheriff reached the pool-hall, noting that but four patrons were there, and that Whitmore was counting his cash as a preliminary to closing the place. A small, but congenial crowd was in the Elite, and Delaney was pleased to see that no poker game was in progress. That meant that the saloon would be closed early, and that no gambling rows were to be anticipated.

Relieved, Delaney turned Pete homeward, shaking him into a brisk canter up the dark street.

The women had been right. He might as well have stayed in and——

He checked Pete, and his right hand threw the skirt of the slicker back to grope

for his holster. Somewhere on ahead, the night had spoken—in what way precisely, Delaney could not make out.

It was a queer, muffled sound, whether the voice of a human or that of an animal, the sheriff could not determine. Low at first, it rose in a strained crescendo, ending suddenly in a weird screech of pain and terror that caused even Delaney's steel nerves to jerk sympathetically. His gun out now, he sent Pete hurtling northward for a few mighty strides, then checked him as suddenly and wrenched him sharply to the right to stop where the imposing Stockman's National Bank building loomed dimly, a little way back from the walk. At that instant, somewhere back of the bank, a heavy gun roared, raising a thousand blaring echoes in the sleeping town. Seconds later, a cone of red flame leaped up in the darkness of the alley as the shot from behind the bank was answered.

"What is it, Ed?" Delaney called, slipping out of saddle and charging blindly across the walk. He knew the voice of that gun.

"Bank rob'ry—murder too, prob'ly," Ed Castor's voice rolled back from the alley. "Watch out! He's ducked aroun' th' buildin'."

With Castor's gun splitting the night with a succession of blasts, Delaney heard the creak of saddle-leather, then the scrape of pounding hooves in the cross street. Immediately he whirled and ran back for his horse.

Pete had moved a little way, and when he located him, the sheriff had to grope for the dangling rein. Perhaps twenty seconds had elapsed since the other had mounted before he was in saddle and away. Five additional seconds carried him around the bank corner and into the cross street. "He went nor-r-th," Ed Castor bellowed, as Pete plunged past the alley.

"Stay here," Delaney roared back, then leaned over Pete's neck and gave him the rein. He had sighted no one as yet, but hoofbeats on ahead guided him to some extent. He estimated that he was not more than two blocks behind when the fugitive's horse pounded over the culvert by the little schoolhouse. A minute later, hoofbeats rang on the rock outcrop that marked the beginning of the two-mile slope toward Bear Creek, and Delaney was disappointed to discover that he had made but small gain, if any.

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THE sheriff was a good rider, and Pete was supposed to be the fastest bit of horseflesh on the Two Butte range. His first rush having failed to bring him up with the quarry, Delaney checked the gelding slightly and settled him down for a long grind. The rain had ceased; the moon had commenced to silver the tips of the dank dunes off to eastward. If only that flying skulker would stick to the trail——

A mighty splashing of water on ahead told that the chase had crossed the creek —still holding his own. Beyond the ford the trail split, but Delaney did not worry. Pete was a cattle horse from the tip of his foretop to the end of his tail. He would run by sound as well as by sight. It was not surprising then, that, after pounding through the sand for half a mile, Pete fished for the bit, unhesitatingly turning out on the sod to the left when his master gave him his head. Uneasy on the instant, Delaney grated his even teeth and swore beneath his breath when, a few minutes later, the gelding slackened his pace uncertainly, and commenced to swerve right and left questingly.

Delaney was in no wise puzzled. His horse had been running by sound. The other horse had stopped somewhere—perhaps after having circled or doubled back —so there was no sound. Delaney stopped, too, even dismounted and stepped a few yards away so that the panting of his hard-ridden horse would not muffle other sounds.

No use. The sough of the prairie wind through the brush down on the creek bottom, the dolorous clamor of the coyote pack up on the ridge, were the only sounds to come out of the night. Once Pete neighed loudly and Delaney mounted quickly when a horse bugled an answer, down on the bottom. But when he galloped down there in hot haste, he found a crippled stray that had been dropped by some herd driver. That was all.

The sheriff knew that he was defeated, now. That rush to the creek was what the other fellow had been waiting for. Delaney could imagine him walking his horse softly in another direction, chuckling in his sleeve. Backing that theory, he sent Pete racing away from the creek on the faint chance that the maneuver would bring contact again.

No good. What next to do?

Nothing—precisely nothing that gave even a faint promise of success. An hour later, after the rising moon had silvered the prairie, the sheriff started dejectedly homeward—empty-handed and utterly defeated, as usual.

But one sensible thing remained to be done. The hard buffalo sod of the plain carried no clear sign. Back there in the soft sand of the trail, Delaney would seek confirmation of the suspicion that filled his mind, but which, unsupported by direct evidence, would be inadmissible in any court.

This suspicion was more than a mere supposition in the sheriff's mind. It had become a firm conviction needing only——

Again Pete started eagerly forward, his trim ears cocked expectantly. No promise in that. That other fellow wouldn't be hanging around waiting to be caught, when over there in the northwest lay the rock-washes where no track would show, and from whence he could go at his leisure in any direction he chose. Delaney was in no manner surprised when, upon reaching the moonlit trail, he saw Ed Castor's lean white horse come lumbering along it toward him.

"'Nother water haul, eh?" the deputy surmised dejectedly, halting his horse nose-to-nose with Delaney's and squirming crosswise in saddle to hold a thoroughly enjoyable season of mourning. "Git any sight of that jasper, or anything t' go by?"

"No," Delaney almost snapped. "I didn't get sight of him, but I do know one thing for certain. They ain't but one hoss in this man's country that kin get away with it with Pete. Can you guess which one I mean?"

"Wa-al," Ed considered judgmatically. "Take ol' Whitey, here. He's got kinda rickety in 'is old age. When he was a

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four year old though, he could dig sod with th' best of 'em. I gotta yearlin' at home that's boned an' muscled to make a real go-gittin' heller, some day. Maybe you was indicatin' him."

"Ain't talkin' 'bout has been's nor will be's," Delaney told him. "What I'm interested in is a right now cayuse that sifted as much sand as Pete did, comin' out here. I'm thinkin' I know what hoss it was. If I'm right, this thing's gonna be a cold cinch. Le's have a squint at th' sign."

They did squint at the sign in a sand-pocket down by the creek where every hoofprint showed clearly.

Black disappointment again. The pursued man's horse had not been shod in front with rolling motion plates. It had not been shod at all.

Another suspicion immediately leaped into Delaney's searching mind, to be tucked away there when Ed Castor said cheerfully, "Wal, they'll be a buryin' in town late this evenin', prob'ly; so we better ease back and commence t' git ready for it."

"Tell me all about what happened as we ride," Delaney ordered, starting Pete into a running-walk, the deputy falling in alongside.

I WAS gittin' ready t' bed down," Ed related, "I'd shed my boots an' socks an' let down my galluses and was startin' t' onbutton my breeches, when I thought I heard a kinda ghostly hollerin', somewheres.

"I kinda strung my clothes back on me an' eased out th' back way, thinkin' th' noise come frum th' alley. After a bit, I located it indefinite on t'other side of th' street. Just after I'd oozed over thar, th' noise got a little louder, and I could locate it in th' bank. Just then come that kinda coyote yell, an' immediate I seen a feller ram out through th' back door. He seen me, too, an' cracked down on me. Right thar's where you come in.

"Wal, after you'd fanned it after that fence-creepin' wampus, I looked th' bank over, findin' th' back door open. By that time, th' boys had come a-runnin' frum th' saloon an' th' pool-hall. We got a lantern an' went inside an' found poor little ol' Barnes, th' cashier, tied fast to a cheer, an' deader'n a mackerel.

"Doc Thornton come trottin' in 'bout that time, an' helt a post-mortar. Doc figgers that th' geezer ketched Barnes at home an' fetched 'im to th' bank, hogtyin' 'im an' makin' 'im tell how t' open th' vault. Then, after gittin' out th' money, he starts chokin' Barnes t' death, not wantin' t' make a noise by shootin'.

"Doc's dope is that Barnes manages t' make a little noise—which same is what I heared—so th' mangy devil up an' just breaks Barnes' stringy little neck 'tween 'is hands an' elopes with th' mazuma.

"One thing's certain—th' geezer that done that job is stronger than hoss-reddish."

"Yeh," the sheriff commented. "He's as strong as they make 'em, an' he rides a hoss that's as fast as greased previousness—damn 'im."

After the two had ridden a little way in somber silence, Ed suggested that when they reached town that they get a little sleep in order to be in shape to enjoy the funeral to the utmost. But when they reached the lane that led up to the sheriff's home, he turned in there, Ed following, under protest. After their horses had been groomed and fed, they gulped hot coffee and packed their saddlebags with bacon-and-egg sandwiches the women had prepared.

Then they rested for a time, Ed snoring loudly on the sofa in the living room, Delaney dozing in a rocking-chair by the bay window. The east was growing rosy when they saddled and rode townward. Even at that early hour, the sidewalk in front of the bank was packed with townsmen when the two officers rode up.

"Any luck?" Harry Whitmore stepped to the edge of the walk to ask hopefully. Harry looked worried, and a little excited.

"Mebbe so," Delaney answered, noncommittally.

"Yeah, *mebbe-so*," Jim Oliver sneered in

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the fringe of the crowd. "That thar *mebbeso* is 'bout all we've heared, lately."

It was easy for Delaney to size up the situation. Jim Oliver was a brother-in-law of Standish, the bandit Delaney had killed. Now Oliver was contending that Standish had been innocent, citing as proof the indisputable fact that the outrages had continued after Standish had been disposed of.

Good old Harry Whitmore was defending the sheriff, and Delaney could see that there was a good prospect of an armed clash between his supporters and his enemies. "I wish you fellows would leave this thing to me," he said earnestly. "I'm doin' everything that can be done."

"Which ain't a hull lot," Oliver sneered again, and two or three fellows tittered discreetly.

"That'll be enough from you, Oliver," Delaney flared, his square chin thrusting. "I've told you that I'm doin' my best. And, well I'm bettin' that that best is gonna be good enough. You'll feel mighty sick when I noose that robber an' fetch 'im in."

"When?" Oliver wanted to know.

Delaney bit his lip. That was it, *when?*

Ignoring the question, he called Harry Whitmore across the street for a two-man conference. "We're ridin' west," Delaney dropped his voice to say. "Can't say how fur, or when we'll git back.

"I want you t' round up four-five of our personal friends an' keep 'em ready t' ramble. If I send fur you, follow our sign till you come up 'ith us. Do it?"

"Plenty willin'. Want real lead-pushers, I reckon."

"Yeh—an' white men, through an' through. May want 'em t' handle a little money."

Harry brightened perceptibly. "Oh, so you think——?"

"Yeh, that's what I think, precise," Delaney said, cryptically, then wheeled his horse and started, Ed following, grumbling over the prospect that they might miss the funeral.

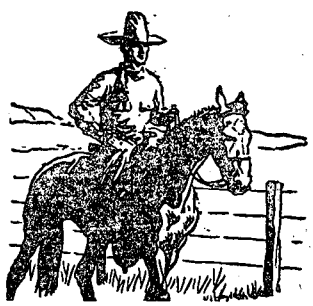
"Seems like it's downright ondecent for us t' up an' leave outright when they's a real fustclass funeral on," the lean deputy lamented. "And a good man, at that."

"Right now, I'm payin' more 'tention to th' live bad 'uns than th' dead good 'uns," Delaney reminded him. "'Course if you don't want in on this——"

"Aw go to hell," Ed replied. "If you're promisin' t' show me a live bad 'un, reckon I can bring myself t' pass up that other important event."

WOLF BULLARD'S western trail was not hard to find. It showed here and there in the jumble of tracks that cupped the side street. After a little time, it led unmarred into a twisting trail that ran westward to where Bear Creek curved its way around the little cowtown.

Even a novice could have read the sign in the sandy creek bottom. There were the big gray's tracks, each showing dabs



of loose sand where the rolling motion plates had gouged it up instead of cutting it cleanly. There were the tracks of the hind shoes, the toe and heel calks showing plainly. There, too, were the prints left by the squaw's unshod horse, the sign proving that she was trailing her burly master as an aide follows a military officer.

Mingling with the others were the tracks made by the Bullards on their way to town. The gray's tracks showed bare-footed in them.

Delaney was pleased to see that the rain had been so light that it had obliterated none of the tracks, though it had washed all of them lightly. The entire value of his investigation hinged upon that other-

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wise unimportant fact. Wolf had started for home, before that shower. Had he preceded it all of the way there? Also, he had started for home on a peculiarly-shod horse. Had the horse continued to wear those peculiar shoes?

Delaney was positive in his own mind that he knew the answer to these questions—so positive that no apparent alibi would serve to clear Wolf Bullard so far as the sheriff was concerned. The thing remaining to be done was to prove the correctness of his theory. And every yard he traveled westward tended to make Wolf's alibi the stronger.

AFTER crossing the creek, the bridle-path looped a low ridge and dipped into a rock-floored hollow where a small pond afforded all-the-year water for a dozen or so broomtail mares Jim Oliver had planted there as a harem for a low-grade percheron stallion he had acquired in a trade. This band was grazing, spread along the hillside north of the hollow, as the two officers wormed their way through the cluster of boulders by the pond. "'S funny I don't see that stud-hoss of Oliver's nowheres," Ed Castor remarked, eyeing the scattered band with idle interest. "Must be he got t' thinkin' who he b'longed to an' jumped inta th' pond an' drownded hisself."

"Th' bunch is spread out some," Delaney commented. "Prob'ly he's feedin' in one of them sumac swales, up on th' flat."

"I hope you're wrong, but I'm afraid you're right," Ed agreed disgustedly. "Nothin' ever happens t' that kinda hoss. A feller that'll turn a scrub like him loose on th' open range would steal mutton an' eat it."

After leaving the little basin, the sign continued westward over a lonesome trail that had not been traveled recently by any other riders. "Them tracks is as easy t' foller as so many street signs," Ed Castor remarked hopefully. "Mebbe if we speed up a little, we might git back t' town in time t'——"

"Uh-uh," Delaney negatived. "He walked 'is hoss; we'll walk ours."

"I'm glad he wasn't crawlin' on 'is belly," Ed came back. "If he was, I reckon we'd have to crawl on ourn."

The sheriff made no answer, but continued to maintain his slow gait. Four or five miles further on, when the sign showed that the horses they were following had broken into a slow jog, Delaney did likewise, slowing again where the others did. "Loco," Ed Castor informed the world in detached, judgmatical way. "Plumb orey-eyed loco, with no hope of 'mediate improvement."

"Dunno but you're right, at that," Delaney admitted, dejectedly, stopping his horse at the entrance of a gap between two big cedar-clad hills.

The sheriff knew that Wolf's place was just beyond. He looked at his watch, then shook his head hopelessly. Traveling at the same gait maintained by the horses on ahead, he had spent a little over three hours coming from town. Wolf had started home at five-thirty. It would have been impossible for him to have jerked the shoes off the gray and raced back to town in time to have committed the crime, at nine. Also, as the entire trail had been made before the shower fell, Wolf could not have made any part of it after the robbing and killing.

"Damn," the sheriff muttered.

"Damn," Ed Castor echoed dutifully. "Besides all that though, what comes next?" He squinted at the sun, then added hopefully, "If we hustle right back to town, we may be in time to——"

"Hit th' trail if you're honin' to," Delaney said indifferently. "I'm gonna go on in an' take a little look aroun'."

"What yuh 'gonna look fur—nuggets?"

"Mebbe somethin' like that. When yuh git t' town——"

"Who said anythin' 'bout me goin' t' town?" Ed sputtered. "I said somethin' 'bout us goin', but——"

"C'mon, then. Looks like we're plumb mired down; but we'll go see what we see when we see it."

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III

WRITTEN IN THE SANDS

NOBODY was in sight when the two officers left the gap and turned to the left into the yard that fronted the cottonwood log house. But Delaney could *feel* someone looking at them as they passed the house and stopped at the water trough. While their horses drank, he looked the untidy place over.

On past the dwelling, there was a long, narrow bunkhouse, for the accommodation of Wolf's half-dozen riders. Still beyond it was the ramshackle stable and the corrals. Decay and disorder showed everywhere, and such cattle as could be seen grazing on the lower flat looked lean and scabby.

Such a place wouldn't earn salt for the cattle—and these didn't look as though they'd been salted often. Yet Wolf Bullard paid his hands and his store bills promptly, and always had cash for drinking and gambling. It just must be that he——

"Speakin' t' me?" Ed Castor asked politely at the sheriff's elbow.

"No. Talkin' t' myself, like a Mex sheepherder. Gittin' jittery, shore enough, I reckon. When things ain't what they are an' other things are what they ain't ——"

"I see," Ed broke in, pulling thoughtfully at his long mustaches. "Loss o' sleep an' th' heat, mebbe. I don't think its hereditary in your fam'ly, so your children may be all right. When you feel a spell comin' on, I wish you'd——"

"I'm thinkin' of havin' a violent spell most any time now, an' it'll be shore t' hit me hard if you don't stop that monkey chatter an' let me think some. C'mon, I wanta take a look at them horses over in th' far corral."

CIRCLING the bunkhouse, the two passed an aged Indian man in semi-white attire who sat on the steps, a rifle across his knees. He did not move or look up when Delaney said "Hello" in passing.

"Nice friendly ol' badger," Ed Castor shrugged. "Whoo-ee! It wouldn't surprise me none t' feel a bullet come whangin' inta my spine most any time, now. People has such strange ideas as t' how t' welcome th' passin' pilgrim."

Before reaching the corral, they met the squaw. She evidently had been to the spring below the barn, as she had a pole on her shoulders, with a bucket of water on each end of it. She grunted a surly acknowledgment of the sheriff's greeting as she stepped out of the path to let them pass, then waddled on her way like the patient beast of burden that she was.

Reaching the corral, Delaney saw that the gray horse was in the bunch, so he swung down and dropped the gelding's rein. Before he had climbed the fence, he saw that the gray was wearing shoes, but he proposed to take a good look, while he was at it. Working the docile animal into a corner with no trouble, he picked up a forefoot.

No doubt about it. The rolling motion plates were there. The sheriff was turning away, when he saw Wolf Bullard's big corduroy-clad figure, and the ever-grinning face leered at him between the corral bars. "Thinkin' of buyin' that hoss?" the big rancher asked, his pale eyes slitting. "If you are, I'm wonderin' how come you didn't stop at the house an' holler. You ain't in town now, understan'. An' I'm runnin' this place, plumb regardless of any human."

"Got my consent," Delaney assured him, climbing back over the fence and remounting. Out of the tail of his eye he noted that the old Indian on the bunkhouse steps had brought his rifle to a ready, and that three of Wolf's hands had perched themselves on the far fence of the corral, each with a hand hovering near his hoslter. Ed Castor's face had lost its mournful expression and was shining with the unholy joy it always registered when a real fight was in prospect.

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Delaney knew he was in a tight spot, but his fighting blood was up. "Now that you mention it, Wolf," he said, easily, "I wouldn't mind ownin' that gray. I believe he's th' only hide in this man's country that kin keep a-throwin' dust in th' face of Pete, here."

"Might be he could, at that," Wolf grunted, then threw his shaggy head back and laughed outright—something he rarely did. "Haw-haw-haw! Uh-huh, I reckon my hoss can bob noses with that 'un o' yourn. Haw-haw-haw! That is, if he gits a even break, understan'. I don't believe he can do it a-wearin' rollin' motion plates, though."

"I don't either," Delaney agreed readily. He braced himself for what might come as he looked at the other, level eyed and added, "No use in whisperin' under th' covers, Wolf. Me an' you is playin' a close, hard game, an' up to now, you got me bested. But t'day's only t'day, Wolf. They'll be a t'morrow an' a nex' day."

"For hoss-racin'?" Wolf asked, guffawing again.

"No—for man fightin'," Delaney snapped, keeping his eyes on the rancher's big, sun-cooked hands and hoping that Ed was keeping watch on the punchers.

But Wolf appeared to be enjoying the humor of the situation hugely. "First it's hoss-racin', then it's man-fightin', eh?" he chortled. "Any other form of 'musement that you're thinkin' o' takin' up?"

"Yeh," Delaney said, gathering up his reins and turning the sorrel to go. "I'm thinkin' of puttin' in a lot of my spare time workin' puzzles. Right now I gotta pretty tough one on hand that's got me int'rested—deep. But I'll work it out, Wolf. Shore as shootin' is shootin', I'll work it out."

"When?" Wolf taunted dryly, as the two officers started away.

Delaney didn't answer. There was no answer. The evidence was iron-clad, and it was all with Wolf Bullard. Yet, as Delaney rode back through the gap, he felt more firmly convinced than ever that he was riding away from the man he would trade singing lead with, sooner or later.

When?

That's what Jim Oliver had asked. That's what Wolf Bullard had asked.

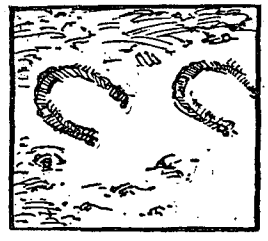
There was no answer.

ON THE homeward way, Ed Castor kept squinting at the sun and crowding his old white horse to the utmost. He might get home and put on his funeral regalia in time, after all. Smiling at his deputy's haste, despite his own inner despondency, Delaney followed, slowing down occasionally to examine the tracks in the trail in a desultory way. They had passed the little pond in the rock gully and started up the ensuing incline when Delaney reined in sharply and swung down to examine the sign again.

"Them's hoss tracks," Ed Castor informed his superior helpfully. "Come on, le's ramble along an'——"

Swinging into saddle, Delaney sent the sorrel surging back across the basin again, Ed prodding his panting mount in a vain attempt to keep alongside.

Up on the plain again, the sheriff threw his tall form out of saddle to fairly nose at the sign. Ed had started to mumble out some sarcastic inquiry, when Delaney swung up and raced the sorrel back to the other side at top speed. This time, he dropped to all fours and hurriedly spanned



off some measurements with his hands, after which he leaped into saddle and retraced his course, meeting Ed Castor about half way.

"Third lap," the lean deputy shouted, then reined Whitey in and dismounted. "I'll stay here till I kinda git my head

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cleared up," Delaney heard him call. "Me'n' Whitey's gittin' dizzy an' splay-eyed tryin' t' follow you when you go two ways at once."

Down again, Delaney spanned hurriedly with his hands once more, then jumped into saddle and stood up in stirrups to turn slowly and view the landscape in every direction. He had just settled back in saddle when Ed's nasal voice whined up from the basin: "I knowed it—you got th' jumpin' heeby-jeebies again! If you was lookin' for somethin' that really *is*——"

"I wasn't," Delaney whooped joyfully, as he started the sorrel back down the decline. "I was lookin' for somethin' that *ain't.*" He threw himself out of saddle and dropped Pete's rein. "Now I'm gonna start lookin' for somethin' that certainly oughta be."

"Thanks for th' information. Now that I understand, go right ahead with your potato-racin' an' hop-skotch game. Me'n' Whitey is 'bout recovered from our dizzy spell an' can see you plain, most of th' time. We're enjoyin' it, huge, an' if I know anythin' at all——"

"You do," Delaney yelped delightedly. "You made the discovery that's gonna clear this whole mess up."

"Yeh, I made th' discovery, all right; same's I told you before, it's th' heat an' loss o' sleep. Better go down t' th' pond an' hold yur head under water for a spell, then——"

"I'll chuck yours under an' hold it there if you don't shut yur yappin' an' listen.

"Now quit lookin' gopher-eyed at me an' pay 'tention t' what I say. I'm stayin' here—important business. I want you t' fork that fleabit ol' hide an' feed 'im steel and whag leather all th' way t' town. I don't give a damn if he drops dead when you hit Main Street.

"When you git there, ease up t' Harry Whitmore, quietlike, an' tell him t' round up that bunch of his an' come a-fannin' it. What I mean is I wanta hear their shirt-tails a-buzzin' by th' time they get within a mile of me. Understan'?"

"Yeh—it's th' heat, an'——"

"Git!"

"—an' loss of sleep. I'm gittin', though, some prompt an' plumb willin'. You won't mind if I send a strait-jacket along out with 'em, just in case——"

"Git!"

Ed got. After he had disappeared over the crest of the ridge, spurring Whitey into a shaky gallop, Delaney rubbed his palms together, delightedly. "I'm gonna talk t' myself again," he announced to the lathering Pete as he loosened the cinches to allow the over-ridden horse to catch his wind. "I'm gonna talk t' myself again—an' this time, th' conversation's gonna be pleasant.

"First thing I'm sayin' is just this: Wolf Bullard, I got you—got you dead to rights! If I find what I'm expectin' t' find in this gulch, I got you cinched a little tighter. But in any case, I got you!

"You played a smart game, you lobo-toothed ol' dew-drinker, but it didn't work! When I get tired o' tellin' that t' myself, I'm gonna sing myself a song. An' the chorus of it is gonna be, 'I got you—got you, got you!'"

IV

MAN TO MAN

IT LACKED a few minutes of three o'clock when Sheriff Delaney rode his jaded sorrel into the gap that gave ingress to the Bullard place. Behind him rode Harry Whitmore, alert and dependable; the two Underhill boys, sons of Delaney's best friends; Dan Fletcher, the peppery little owner of the Elite who would have been bitterly disappointed if left out of a prospective gun-fight, and young Sam Linton, Delaney's junior deputy, who never had heard angry lead but was willing to follow the sheriff anywhere. Bringing up the rear, grumbling at every yard, Ed Castor steered a borrowed roan, having been forced to leave old Whitey back in town.

Before leaving the slash, Delaney stopped to huddle his men and give final instructions. "When you reach that bunch o'

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alders, slide down an' tie 'em. Work along th' ridge afoot till you get straight west o' th' house. Then belly down into that swale below th' bunkhouse an' lay there till I call you, or somethin' breaks. Then come a-shootin'."

"But what you gonna do?" Harry Whitmore wanted to know.

"Oh, I'm gonna ride right on in an' go to th' house. I'll prob'ly find Wolf there. I'll do my damnedest t' get th' drop on him."

"Yeh," Ed Castor demurred, "an' he'll do his damnedest t' see you first an' plug you.

" 'Sides that, what about them other gazabos? Gonna gun 'em all?"

"Some of 'em may be out workin' aroun' th' place—mebbe all of 'em but th' squaw an' that ol' Injun."

Ed Castor was skeptical. "I looked this place over plumb circumspect when we was up here this mornin'. I don't b'lieve anybody ever does any work on it. Them snaky-eyed booze-swillers is just gunmen. They'll massycree you, on sight."

"Ed's right," Harry declared. "I think we'd better stick t'gether, an' rush 'em."

Delaney shook his head. "Ground's too open. They'd blow us outa our saddles 'fore we knew what it was all about. Same thing if we ride in slow an' unconcerned. Wolf's gonna know we've come for cold business if he sees a posse. If I go in alone, he'll just be curious at first, though he may git ringy later. Meanwhilst, you fellers can get yourselves placed t' back my play.

"Now make your sneak, boys. I'm gonna wait here ten minutes t' give you time t' get bedded down in that swale."

DELANEY laced up a cigarette and lighted it as he watched the six dismount and disappear among the alders, rifles in hand. He smoked the fag to a short butt, then made and lighted another before leaving the slash. As he rode up the trodden clay path toward the silent house, he again could feel someone gazing at him from inside. He had replaced his rifle in its saddle sheath, and kept both hands locked about the horn.

There were other indications that the appearance of the sheriff had not passed unnoticed. Someone had been chopping wood back of the house. The sound of the axe stopped abruptly and Delaney heard footsteps on the rear porch. A bedraggled calico curtain covering a front window swung aside, then dropped nearly into place again. Over at the bunkhouse, someone called out in a guarded, guttural tone, and the door on the far side of that building creaked on its rusty hinges.

Though all of his faculties were keyed to top tension, the sheriff sat loosely in saddle, complacently puffing at his cigarette as one out for an enjoyable ride. Pete's dusty muzzle was within a dozen yards of the front porch when heavy padding footsteps sounded inside the house. A few seconds later, Wolf Bullard jerked the door open, and stood scowling on the threshold. Behind him, Delaney glimpsed the old Indian man in the act of taking a rifle down from a deerhorn rack on the far wall.

Wolf was in his sock feet, and was rubbing sleep from his eyes with one huge hand. The other hand remained out of sight and the forearm was on a level with his waist—indicating that he was gripping a rifle that leaned against the wall by the doorway. "Back ag'in, eh?" he growled, taking his pale, red-rimmed eyes off the sheriff for an instant to peer suspiciously toward the gap.

"Yeh," Delaney answered casually. "Wanta talk a little more 'bout that argument we had this mornin'."

While he was speaking these few words, the sheriff was working his mind for all it was worth. Wolf Bullard was on guard, and at least one man was right back of him, with a ready rifle. Even if he got the drop on Wolf, he would be an easy target for that hidden marksman. He had to get inside that room somehow, so he would have at least an even break against the two of them.

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Seconds built up that desperate plan. To contribute to its success, he swerved Pete to bring Wolf almost to his rear, and turned his back entirely to swing down, at the same time speaking unconcernedly.

"Plumb sorry t' have interrupted your nap. Same time, an' as I was sayin', I wanta have another little chinfest with you. You know, sometimes it pays for two fellers t' hold a palaver, even if they don't like each other none."

A COUPLE of yards from the door was an open window. But the width of the narrow porch separated him from it as the sheriff dropped Pete's rein and stepped on the boards. As he turned to face the house he heard the rifle barrel rake against the inside wall and knew that Wolf was changing positions slightly, but he went on talking. "Yeh, I ain't two-faced none, so I'm admittin' free that I like you an' trust you 'bout like a ma cow likes an' trusts a lobo.

"Same time, I can't see why we shouldn't talk plain t' each other an', right now, I got somethin' t' say t' you, which is——"

Delaney had veered toward the house and seemed about to pass the window, but, instead, he braced himself for the effort and leaped nimbly sidewise, hunching his body to clear both sill and upper sash. He never had been a deeply religious man, but a prayer was in his heart as he took that half step and blind leap, having staked everything on that surprise maneuver.

What if he had miscalculated the distance? Suppose there was a chair or table just inside, to trip him? What would happen if a spur caught in that swaying curtain? Worse still, somebody might be waiting right there to——

Then, after it seemed he had spent minutes in mid-air, his feet struck floor, skidded as he jerked out his hunch, then steadied him as he jerked a gun free from its holster and spun on his heel to face Wolf and——

Damnation! No Wolf Bullard was in sight; no frowning old Indian. The north end of the room appeared to have rushed toward him. Was he really gitting dippy, as Ed Castor insisted?

A second brought realization. There was a thin board partition between the door and the window, and he had landed in another room.

Minds work fast when the destiny of a human being must be decided within a clock-tick. Knowing only that his plan to come to close quarters and get the drop had been frustrated, Delaney took one cat-like leap toward the door, then drew back.

They'd be waiting for him there, and they'd have all the edge. Even when he touched the knob lightly, a gun roared in the other room and splintered pine stung his wrist as he was drawing it away.

As he worked along the wall away from that dangerous location, Delaney heard Wolf give some low-voiced order. At the same time, it flashed to him that the boys would hear that shot and come a-shootin', according to instructions.

Another mental flash sent him back through the window and tip-toeing rapidly along the wall toward the front door. If he couldn't surprise them one way, he could another.

And he did—with a vengeance. For just as he came to the opening, Wolf Bullard's big body burst through it, the two men striking, breast on.

TWO circumstances teamed together to give Delaney initial advantage when the two men emitted surprised grunts as they collided. One was that Wolf was hampered by the unwieldy rifles; the other was that the quick thinking sheriff dropped his shoulder and rammed ahead with all his force, when he saw that he must come to grips.

Caught full in the solar plexus, the giant rocked back on his heels and inside, the rifle clattered to the floor. Free momentarily, Delaney saw the Indian leap aside to get firing room and swing his rifle up. Delaney fired from the hip, and the Indian

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spun half around, then suddenly fell sidewise as a tree falls.

His balance recovered, thanks to the diversion, Wolf emitted a bull-like roar and closed, grabbing both of the sheriff's arms and employing his massive muscles in pinioning them to his sides, at the same

time jerking Delaney inside the room and turning him around to jam him against the wall.

His gun arm helpless in that vise-like grip, with that fanged, rage-distorted face glaring into his, Delaney writhed and twisted, arching his lithe body when the berserk giant attempted to crack his spine in that awful grasp.

Twice Wolf whirled the lighter man high overhead and attempted to send him crashing to the floor. But each time Delaney managed to keep his feet under him, at the same time maneuvering warily to keep from being pinned against the wall.

As they stamped and heaved to and fro, Delaney heard shots outside, the pound of running feet. For a time, the conflict appeared to roll nearer the house, then recede toward the corrals. Once he was certain that he heard Ed Castor's thin nasal voice raised in a kind of cracked war-whoop.

Wolf Bullard evidently heard, too, for he redoubled his efforts, at the same time changing tactics. Planting his towerlike legs far apart, the giant ceased trying to trip and throw his more agile adversary, trying instead to work his bearlike arms entirely around Delaney and squeeze the breath out of him.

Wolf's sweat mingling with his, Delaney felt that clamping band of bone and flesh encircle his ribs and tighten, tighten, till the sheriff's breath was coming in spasmodic gasps and he felt his strength slowly oozing out of him. "Man-killin'," Wolf mumbled jerkily in his ear. "Man-killin' is right—but you ain't th' one that's gonna do th' killin'. I've busted better men than you are with my hands!"

If Wolf expected the sheriff to wilt in terror, he made a sad error. Instead, lashed by that taunting voice, Delaney gathered every atom of his strength as his fighting spirit flared to full heat. Groaning with the mighty effort, he kinked his supple back and snapped a knee sharply upward into the giant's heaving paunch.

When Wolf's arms relaxed partially, then tightened only slowly, it came to him suddenly that, although his own head appeared to be spinning rapidly and his limbs to be like so much lead, Wolf also was tiring. Unknown until then by either of them, those corded muscles had weakened under the strain. In addition, the sheriff had caught a full breath when that knee trick had brought a moment's respite. It was difficult to believe, but it gradually dawned upon him that he was beating Wolf Bullard—beating him with his bare hands.

THE pistol had been dropped minutes before. It was man to man. Delaney's heart sang with the knowledge that he was the master. Confident now, he swung to the aggressive, punishing the giant's ribs with his elbows, even bunting that ugly, scowling face with his skull. Once, he worked his left arm free and pistoned it into the other's heaving chest, chuckling aloud when Wolf flinched and gasped under the impact of that knotted fist.

Again Delaney writhed free, this time clipping the gasping giant's fanged mouth with a jolting right and left before clinching. Seconds later, he found that he had

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less trouble in throwing off that clinging grasp. Then, as the giant reeled in to get to close quarters again, his pale eyes glazed groggily, the sheriff side-stepped and put every ounce of him into a full-swing right that crashed against the bigger man's jaw.

Wolf's knees buckled, straightened, buckled again, then folded completely when another crushing right followed the first.

The big body collapsed slowly, slewed grotesquely sidewise, then turned face downward and lay still, but for the spasmodic twitching of the great legs.

"I got you, Wolf Bullard," Delaney chanted, glaring down at his inert foe. "I don't care a damn what else has happened, I broke you with my bare hands!"

REELING across the disordered room, Delaney located and recovered his six-gun, then drank sparingly from a wash pitcher on a bench near the door. As he was sluicing a little of the water down his shirtfront and over his brow, he heard a trampling of feet in the yard and looked out to see Ed Castor come running up from the corrals, his long mustaches bristling with excitement, his gangling legs covering the sward in mighty strides. Whitmore was striving manfully to keep up, but with small success.

"Where are yuh, Dan?" Ed yelped as he struck the porch and crossed it with a bound.

"Here!"

"Where's Wolf?"

"There."

"Dead?"

"Nope—just knocked out."

"Just wha-a-a-t?"

"Knocked out. We lost our guns an' fit it out he-man style."

Ed stared pop-eyed. "You mean you ——"

"Yeh. How'd you boys make out?"

Ed still gaped, temporarily incapable of speech. "We won in a walk," Harry explained. "Caught them bunkhouse fellers dead to rights as they was sashayin' up here. Th' way things was, they didn't have a Chinaman's chance. We hazed 'em past th' corrals an' was workin' 'em plumb out into th' open, when they surrendered —all but one stiff 'un an' one leaky geezer who——

"Hello, I see you crimped that Injun feller! I was a wonderin' what had become of 'im."

"Reckon that checks th' herd," Ed recovered his breath to say. "All of 'em's 'counted for 'cept that squaw."

"I expect she's somewhere about th' house," Delaney suggested. "Somehow, I'm thinkin' she was kinda neutral-like durin' this little ruckus. I'm thinkin' she can spare Wolf without mournin' herself plumb t' death. You fellers get a grip on what guns is layin' loose aroun' here, an' ride herd on that big sand-eater while I go hunt th' ol' gal up. Somethin' tells me I'm gonna have a real int'restin' pow-wow with 'er."

V

DELANEY EXPLAINS

IT WAS nine o'clock. Fletcher's bartender and porter were jumping to keep the liquor flowing and the cash register jingling. For the low-ceiled tobacco-fumed room was crowded to its fly-specked walls with ranchers and townsmen who still were discussing the latest crime.

Fortified by a succession of steaming toddies, Jim Oliver was delivering a sort of set oration, the theme of which was that Delaney was an incompetent ass, and that things would get straightened plenty pronto when Wolf Bullard got his vigilance committee to work. Hopelessly outclassed as an orator, but loyal to the marrow of his bones, Bill Simpson was acting at attorney for the defense.

"Yeh," Oliver jeered derisively, "Delaney's a hard-workin' officer, all right, but his work don't seem t' get him nothin'. Where's he been today? Where is he right now? Out rantin' aroun' th' range like a stampedin' steer, same as he was last night.

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"Hard worker, hell! Yuh make me sick, Simpson. Best thing you can do is t' come along with us fellers an' help organize that vigilance c'mitty. We're gonna start as soon as Wolf Bullard comes to town."

"If that's the case, you can be startin' any time now, Oliver," Delaney's even voice sounded out front. The shutter door creaked open to admit the sheriff, Harry Whitmore, Fletcher and Ed Castor.

The clothing of the four men was powdered with white rock dust, and the sheriff looked sleepy eyed and a bit haggard. But he smiled cheerfully as they lined up at the front end of the bar and the bartender jumped to set out Fletcher's private bottle of ten-year-old rye.

Jim Oliver wasn't squelched, by any means, even if he did know that Delaney must have heard a part of his speech. "Wolf's in town, eh? Bully. Then he'll be over here in a little while an' we can ——"

"He's in town, but he won't be over here," Delaney cut in, while the curious crowd milled in closer to listen.

"Won't be here?" Oliver sneered. "How come?"

"'Cause why him an' what's left of 'is bunch is close-penned over there in jail, with Sam Linton an' th' Underhill boys ridin' herd on 'em. . . . Wolf's th' masked bandit, boys. We got a loop on 'im this afternoon."

"Huh," Oliver snorted. "I don't believe Wolf ever done nothin' like that."

"It don't make a whole lotta difference what you b'lieve, Oliver," Delaney observed. "Wolf don't agree with you. He's signed a full confession, already—all legal an' proper, at that." He tilted down the drink he had poured, then refilled his glass and skidded the bottle along the bar toward Ed Castor.

White-haired old Judge Thornton, who was a heavy stockholder in the bank, crowded his way forward to ask tremulously, "And did you succeed in recovering any of the bank's money?"

"Ev'ry dime of it—th' bank's an' everybody else's. It's over there in th' jail, too. All anybody has to do t' git it t'night is t' bust down two steel doors an' make cold meat of Sam an' them Underhill boys, an' Ed Castor. In th' mornin', we'll check up an' pay off. I'm thinkin' they'll be a little left over—former stealin's—in which case it goes t' that ol' Indian woman out there who showed us how t' dig it out frum under th' potato bin, in Wolf's cellar."

"Shut up an' leave him talk, fellers," Harry Whitmore protested, when they commenced smothering the sheriff with questions. "Go ahead, Dan. Commence at th' commencement, an' finish at th' finish. T' tell th' truth, I been with you all th' afternoon, an' I don't know quite all of it, myself."

"I do," Ed Castor announced chestily. "Delaney went into a catfit out there by th' pond this noon, an' when he quit spinnin' he had th' answer. I seen 'im when he grabbed it."

WITH the Elite as silent as a courtroom, Delaney told them about his fruitless chase in the night after a barefooted horse, and the first trip to Wolf Bullard's place on the trail of a plated one. "Then on the way back, I got better 'quainted with them tracks," he explained, smiling at the puzzled look on their faces. "So by th' time we got back to that gully an' was leavin' it on this side, I thought I noticed somethin'—somethin' that I'd overlooked on th' up trip.

"'Bout that time, somethin' Wolf had said, an' somethin' Ed Castor had said popped into my head, an' I neck-roped them two statements together an' almost got th' answer. I did get it cinched tight after I'd chased back an' forth across that basin a few times, makin' some close comparisons. I——"

"It's the heat—heat an' loss of sleep, fellers," Ed Castor explained painstakingly. "Don't judge 'im too harsh; he's been under a severe strain—ain't plumb himself."

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"I ain't gonna argue 'ith Ed none," Delaney smiled, setting his glass down and commencing to roll a smoke. "I'm admittin' that I was a little loco for a while, out there.

"You see, we'd been follerin' Wolf's sign to his place an' back. By th' time we was leavin' th' basin on th' way in, I thought I noticed that Wolf's hoss had toed out a little with his hind feet, all th' way frum th' basin t' Wolf's place, an' walked plumb square 'tween th' basin an' here. I couldn't be plumb sure about that till I'd looked both sets of tracks over, three-four times."

"Potato racin'," Ed Castor cut in, *sotto voce*.

"'Bout that time it come t' me that th' hoss had over-reached 'bout four inches ev'ry step he took west of th' basin an' not more'n two inches per step on this side," Delaney resumed. "I checked that by measurin' each set of tracks, an'——"

"Hop-scotchin'," Ed interjected. "Gosh! You oughta seen 'im leap-froggin' on an' off that hoss."

"Well, anyway, while I was potato-racin' an' hop-scotchin' I was doin' a little thinkin', too." Delaney grinned. "Thinkin' pays. Yuh oughta try it sometime, Ed.

"First thing I thought of was that I'd heared Wolf tell Simpson that he used to shoe hosses.

"Second thing I thought of was that Ed had noticed that Jim Oliver's stud was gone from th' herd. I looked aroun', an' darn if he wasn't gone yet.

"Incidental, he come driftin' along in after Ed had started for town, an' I seen plain that he had nail-holes in his feet—fresh ones, though he was bare-footed. I didn't have th' answer cinched plumb tight then, but I did after I'd scratched aroun' that basin an' found th' place where Wolf had snubbed that stud t' a cedar snag an' nailed them rollin' motion plates on him. Get it?

"On th' way t' town yesterday, Wolf ropes that stud an' ties him t' that cedar where he can get his hands on him. Then he comes in here an' gets them fancy shoes on his gray, gettin' up a argument with Bill in order t' be shore t' call my attention to them.

"Then Wolf an' 'is squaw eases back to th' basin, an' Wolf yanks th' shoes off his hoss an' nails 'em on Oliver's—which is saddle-broke, too, understan'.

"Then th' woman forks th' stud an' leads 'er own bronc, layin' that phoney trail on t' ranch. Meanwhile, Wolf rides a bare-footed hoss across th' prairie, keepin' outa th' trail till he gets into town.

"After robbin' th' bank an' killin' Barnes, he shakes me off an' oozes aroun' home where he puts them shoes back on th' gray hoss an' turns th' stud loose t' drift back t' th' basin.

"Now that's th' end. It's th' end of Wolf Bullard. It's th' end of these robberies an' murders. It's th' end of trouble on Two Butte range!"

"No it ain't," Harry Whitmore denied, backing away from the bar to jerk off his coat and roll up his sleeves. "Come on out into th' alley, Oliver. I'm gonna lick you till you crawl under th' buildin'. Him bein' a officer, it wouldn't do for Delaney to do it. But it's gotta be did, so I'm gonna have that sweet privilege."

AFTER spending ten blissful minutes in the alley, Harry Whitmore returned to the bar, grinning contentedly. The crowd followed—with the exception of Jim Oliver, who was carried home, physically incapacitated, for the time being.

"Set 'em out," Harry called to the bartender. "Give ev'ry ranny one at each elbow." Just then he noticed that Ed Castor was standing next to him, and thwacked the deputy's thin shoulders resoundingly. "Good boy, Ed. Yuh shore backed Delaney's hand a plenty. It's a mystery t' me, though, that you didn't tumble t' Wolf's little game yourself. Must be you wasn't plumb wide awake."

"It was th' heat," Ed Castor explained solemnly. "Th' heat, an' loss o' sleep."

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THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE

G-Heat

IN CONNECTION with his novel *"G-Heat"* in this issue, *Robert H. Rohde* writes us:

"Nowadays I'm just a sidelines rooter for that hard-shooting, straight-shooting bunch, currently the F. B. I. When they crack down on a Dillinger or a Baby Face Nelson or Pretty Boy Floyd, or shunt one more modern Ali Baba to Alcatraz, it's somebody else who writes the story for the papers. But it would certainly be strange, knowing the old "D. of J." as well as I did and do, if I didn't find a special kick in turning loose on a fiction yarn like *'G-Heat.'*

"Years ago—a good while before the underworld invented the term 'G-Men' for the special agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U. S. Department of Justice—a succession of newspaper assignments kept me in close contact with the Bureau. First I got to know 'Chief' Charlie De Woody's Chicago crowd; then in spy-hunting war days, the New York outfit headed by 'Cap' Offley.

"Speaking of spy-hunting, one indelible journalistic memory of mine centers on a weird dumb-luck break I got that day when the D. of J. laconically reported the recapture of the ace German spy, Ignatius Lincoln. Herr Lincoln, if your memory goes so far back, set quite a few all-time records for his craft. Slick? Well, one incredible feat of Iggie's had been to worm into English provincial politics. In that period he actually got himself elected to Parliament; and when he later transferred his activities to America and was arrested here, iron bars did not a prison make—not for slippery Ignatius. For a while he sat pensively in Raymond Street Jail, in Brooklyn. Then one day he up and vanished.

"Weeks passed and there was no news of that escaped Federal prisoner who ranked, bar none, as top U. S. Public Enemy of the day. Venerable Cap Offley looked glum and said nothing until an afternoon came when the A.P. flashed its client newspapers that lost Herr Lincoln was again in custody. I raced to the D. of J. office down Park Row to learn how, where and when, and found Cap a mollusk. He confirmed the main fact and that was all. His attitude was that details, if any, must come from Washington, and a stiff-backed soul he was. His mum meant mum.

"After all, I was a reporter. My job was to get the facts in the case of Ignatius Lincoln—which temporarily put the admired D. of J. and me on opposite sides of the fence. I dug.

"Somewhere late in the afternoon I caught a whisper, 'Red Bank!' and the whisper sent me dashing to Red Bank, New Jersey on the hunch it was there that Lincoln had been nailed. My further hunch was that such an epic collar could hardly have been made without the knowledge of the local police, and that they could be persuaded to exchange information for a squirt or two of the Page One limelight.

"No dice. The Red Bank police chief didn't know a thing. Absolutely didn't. Stumped, I made a wild stab. Were there any communities in or around the town where Germans had bunched up?

"There were. Farming communities. Two of them; one on one side of Red Bank, one on the other. On percentage I picked the larger and more prosperous one and streaked for it in my station taxi. Arriving, I walked in on the farmer who was, according to the hackman, the loudest

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rooter in the section for Kaiser Bill. This, understand, was before America had joined the Allies.

"I had meant to ask questions, but something jittery in the farmer's manner changed my mind. I went out on a limb and said to him, flat:

"'So *you're* the fellow who was hiding Ignatius Lincoln!'

"He stared at me for a minute and then plumped down in an old-fashioned rocker.

"'My Gott, a hundert times you people make me say it alretty!' he gulped. 'I didn't know his name was Lincoln. I didn't know he was a spy. He just comes and works by me like any odder farm hand would. *Ja,* he works for weeks, quiet and indoostrious, and——'

"And the New York *Tribune,* next morning, had a mighty big edge on the Lincoln story.

"P. S.—I was not able to tell, though, how the D. of J. had traced Iggie to Red Bank.

"And P. P. S.—I don't know yet.

"Bob Rohde"

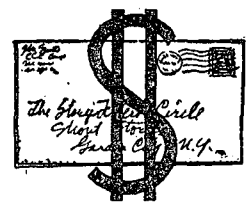
Stephen Chalmers

"Then goodbye to the river, an' the cedar, an' the pine,
When the fire dies down in this last camp o' mine.
An' it's: Hitch yer roll an' hightail!
Roll out on the sky-trail—
Roll out, Ranger, towards the Mornin'!"

IT WAS not long after we received these verses of Steve Chalmers, which we printed in SHORT STORIES in the issue where we used his story, "Roll Out, Ranger!" that we got word that Steve himself, a victim of pneumonia, had "rolled out towards the morning." We shall miss him in the magazine and in him its editors lost a warm personal friend.

Stephen Chalmers had many interests, but we think likely that his greatest was his intense interest in the forests. He had been made an Honorary Member of the United States Forest Service on account of the many stories he had written of the Rangers—many of which we are proud to say were published in SHORT STORIES—and had spent last summer in the Sequoia National Forest, lecturing on the Forest Service in various CCC camps. It was fitting, therefore, that his ashes should be scattered beneath an enormous tree of which he was fond, and which was not far from his summer home in the San Bernardino Mountains. Since it is located in the San Bernardino National Forest it was necessary to obtain permission for burial there from the President. The very trees he loved will be Steve's lasting monument.

C.C.C. Prize Letters



HERE are this issue's prize winning letters from C.C.C. camps. Remember, SHORT STORIES is paying $5.00 for the best letter we print each time, and $2.00 each for as many others as we have space for. They should deal with C.C.C. camp experiences and should be short. Address them to the Editor of SHORT STORIES, Garden City, New York.

This letter wins the $5.00 this time:

The Editor of SHORT STORIES,
Garden City, New York.

This is the story of my adventures—and misadventures—on January 3rd and 4th, 1936, while on a searching party looking for 1st Lt. John T. Helms, Army flier from March Field.

Our camp is located in the San Bernardino National Forest, northeast of Ban-

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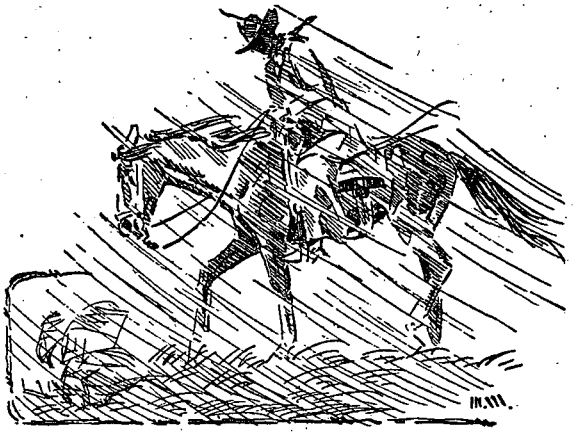
In the next issue——

SHORT STORIES *for April 10th*

Part I of a new serial, by a new author we are proud to introduce to SHORT STORIES *readers, striking a new action note and full of dynamite——*



Rangers Is Powerful Hard to Kill

by

CADDO CAMERON

Also

A Michigan State Police story by KARL DETZER; *"Gunfire at Battle Island" by* Captain FREDERICK MOORE; *a Northern story by* J. ALLAN DUNN; *"The Pekin Parrot" by* WALTER C. BROWN; *and a yarn of Dynamite Drury of the South African Police by* L. PATRICK GREENE, *etc., etc., etc.*

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ning, California, where many fliers have been lost. Our duties are building roads, firebreaks. Oftentimes we fight fires and make up searching parties. Thursday, Jan. 3rd, we were to search the north side of Whitewater Canyon. We must have hiked fifteen miles that day through gulches, wooded slopes, and manzanita, with Army Planes buzzing overhead. About 3:30 the Forester in charge found we could not cover the allotted territory before dark, so he split us. Five of us set out to follow the terrain at the same altitude until reaching an old abandoned road, then return to camp. I was the third in the file. The usual way—a bad one—was for the faster men to lead and take rests frequently to look things over and let the slower men catch up. I did my poor best but soon lost the men ahead and followed tracks. They started down a gravel slide—decomposed granite, of which these mountains consist, the most treacherous known to me. Following them over a thousand feet at full speed, I started a small landslide. Then, to my horror I saw the tracks disappear over a tall cliff, and I was following! I grabbed a bush—thank God for bushes which stay put—and missed going over by about fifteen feet. To the left I saw a chute, so I tried to get down to the fellows below who might be seriously hurt. The rock crumbled, and I shot down the chute until I caught another bush, and came to rest on a ledge. Ahead of me was sheer cliff, eighty feet down; to my right a chasm; above, that damned chute; and to my left the ledge about nine inches wide. (Come and measure it—I'll show it to you!) It took a good half-hour to crawl the twelve feet of crumbling ledge until I reached a tree. I have never been—shall I say—so uneasy. But sometimes hanging with one hand to quarter-inch branches when rocks as big as my head broke off at the weight of my hand, I dug each foothold in the gravel on the ledge, and made it. From the tree, I worked back up the slope. Two and a half hours to ascend a slope I came down in less than two and a half minutes will tell my difficulties.

The moon was up and bright by this time, and I could follow tracks, so decided to retrace the entire hike. But I lost the trail, so went down to the creek to follow it east to the highway if necessary, eleven miles away. But when I saw a campfire, I investigated. It was two other boys, also lost from their party. We exchanged tales, and I learned that an impassable falls was ahead. So after staying all night at the fire, we climbed the mountains to the south. It was the most precipitous climb I have ever navigated. About four hundred feet of this was a virtual wall of manzanita, where we left an appreciable amount of clothing. Gaining the ridge at last we saw the trail half a mile away—which meant a full mile to get to it. Then we collapsed and slept for over two hours. The five-mile hike to camp was completed about 2:30 P. M., just in time to forestall a searching party sent for us. I learned from them that that man who went over the cliff was fortunate, and landed on a slanting pile of gravel, jarring him semi-conscious but not injuring him. He beat me to camp! The rest of the party was found the night before, lost in the canyon. We had a meal, and almost fell asleep undressing.

Next day I was on the carpet and punished with a week's loss of privileges for not staying with the party—actually for not following my teammate over the cliff! We never did find Lt. Helms.

Robert D. Adams

C.C.C. Co. 1943,
Camp Whitewater,
Banning, California

And the writers of the following letters are being sent checks for $2.00.

The Editor of SHORT STORIES,
Garden City, New York.

After reading the prize letters in the February 10th issue of your magazine,

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from C.C.C. camps, I thought that the following little incident should be interesting.

Our camp is located on one of the main streets of this city, on the bank of the Winooski River. There is a grade school nearly opposite the camp.

One morning in January 1934, we heard several children screaming. We went out to investigate and discovered that a little girl had touched her tongue to the steel rail of the bridge and was stuck fast. We immediately procured some hot water and it took us about thirty minutes to warm that rail enough so that she could get her tongue loose. After her tongue came loose she just went on her way to school as tho' nothing had happened. But I'll bet that there is one little girl that will keep her tongue away from cold steel.

That particular morning it was thirty degrees below zero.

Very truly yours,

Elwin L. Salley,

Senior Leader

1113th (S) Co., C.C.C.-VC,

Camp Barre, Vermont

The Editor of SHORT STORIES,

Garden City, New York.

I have finished reading your last issue of the SHORT STORIES, and have a story to enter in your C.C.C. Contest.

I am at present a member of Co. 3788, Berryville, Arkansas, but the beginning of my story is at Camp Pike, Arkansas in June, 1933, with Co. 768.

Corporal Beaton, Johnnie Wortham, Ross Harrell and myself were the members of the Supply Tent. On the twenty-sixth of June we loaded all of the company's equipment on the train, which included tents and poles. The tent poles, about 300 in all, were racked from the floor to the ceiling on one side of the baggage car, with three or four 2 x 4's holding them in place. We left Little Rock around midnight, therefore when the train was rolling along, we went to sleep wherever we could find a place.

Corporal Beaton slept in a chair leaning against some baled straw, on top of which a sack of lime was placed. The rolling of the car shook the sack off and it fell on top of the corporal's head and neck. The sack broke and covered him with lime, besides filling the car. It awakened the rest of us and caused a lot of merriment till the lime got too thick to breathe.

We finally got rid of the lime and returned to our beds. I slept on a sack of sugar opposite the poles and Ross Harrell slept on the top of the desk which was against the poles and on the end. Some time afterwards a very loud crash startled me out of my sleep. I naturally thought that the train was wrecked. There was a wreck all right, thought it wasn't the train. The 2 x 4 pieces had given away and all those poles tumbled down making a wreck of most everything in the middle section of the car. I first noticed the ends of about 100 or 150 poles that had fallen on top of the desk. My one and only thought then was of Ross, as I just knew that he was lying on top of that desk. I called his name several times before he answered. He was on the floor where he had moved just a short time before the poles fell. The desk had been too hard to sleep on so he had moved to the floor to sleep, where the desk had upheld the poles from crushing him.

Incidentally, one of the 2 x 4's was all that saved me from injury. One had failed to break when the poles fell on them. One end was nailed to the floor, the other end nailed to the ceiling, but when the top end came loose and struck the opposite wall, it failed to break and held the poles up off of me.

It was funny after it was all over with, but it wasn't a darn bit funny at the time, and no one was any the worse for all the accidents.

Sincerely yours,

Clarence Lamb

Co. 3788, C.C.C.,

Berryville, Ark.

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A Big Thrill

IN OUR next issue we are starting a serial by an author new to SHORT STORIES, and a story which has interested us very much. There are several reasons for this—good color (of the Texas Panhandle, two likable leading characters in Badger and Blizzard (two Texas Rangers working under cover on a tough assignment) and some of the liveliest action that we've read for a long time. But on reading "Rangers Is Powerful Hard to Kill," the following passage from the story hit us full in the eye:

"Kinda go over some of yo' laws, will yuh, Marshal?" urged Blizzard in the riproaring town of Casota.

"That's a right good idee, Tom," Badger spoke up; "then me and him won't run no chances breakin' of 'em accidental."

Long Tom said he didn't mind, and proceeded carefully as though he considered it important to make everything clear to the strangers. "We ain't got many laws, and you prob'ly won't find any of 'em printed in statute books; but what we got shore do cover most of the human ailments—you might say. For example—if a feller shoots up a saloon or busts up ary place, he pays fair and square damages to the boss of it, and no hard feelin's. If he bushwhacks, or shoots or knifes in the back, or guns or carves a feller that ain't heeled—we hang him. If he mistreats a woman, good or bad—we hang him. If he is or has been a thief someplace else, that don't bother us none; but if he does any stealin' around here—we hang him. Fact is—we're 'specially careful to hang our local hoss thieves a-plenty. That's about all. Of course, short-card sports and cold-deck artists is always hung if they git caught, providin' the feller that caught 'em don't salivate 'em first."

"Well," we thought, "here is Halfaday Creek transplanted to the Southern Boundary instead of a far Northern one," and our interest was much aroused. We are sure yours will be, too, and advise you to get aboard for the first installment of this new serial in our next number. It is by Caddo Cameron—a name that is going to stand out in Western fiction.

A Strange Survival

A STRANGE story it is, *Charles Tenney Jackson's "The House of the Spear"* in this issue, and about it Mr. Jackson says:

"There are still traces of the old Carib and Arawak Indian stock in the wild restricted area of Eastern Jamaica. The name 'Maroon' is proudly claimed by families there much as Mayflower is in America among the whites. 'Maroon' is short for *'Cimarron,'* derived from the Spanish *cima,* meaning mountain top, a place out of which the early settlers were unable to get back runaway slaves, it seems.

"The rebel black men, joining with the remnants of the red ones, defied Spaniards and English alike when the latter came to Jamaica. It took a century of trouble till many of the Maroons were deported to Nova Scotia in 1796, and even on to the abolishment of slavery in 1834, these hill warriors terrorized the outlying plantations.

"As for *Obeah,* much as the natives deny its practice the colony government prosecutes its practitioners when they catch 'em! Which isn't often in the impassable Cockpit Hills. However it seems to be now rather a harmless secret cult. Anyhow, they tell you that. A veteran inspector of constables in Kingston told me that white men have crossed the John Crow Hills but four times in a century, and looking at the rock-and-mangrove jungle one can believe it. And I talked with hill villagers who still believe that King George the Second made a treaty with their Maroon ancestors because they couldn't be beaten by the English troops! Proud of it as a dam' Yankee is of Bunker Hill and Yorktown.

"Charles Tenney Jackson"

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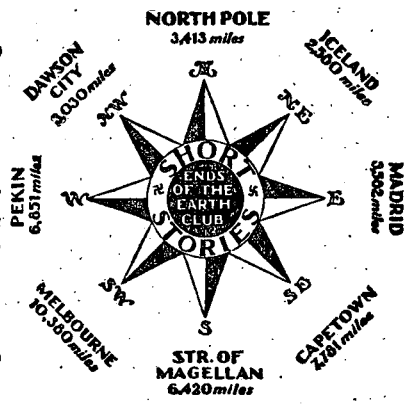
THE ENDS OF THE EARTH CLUB



HERE is a free and easy meeting place for the brotherhood of adventurers. To be one of us, all you have to do is register your name and address with the Secretary, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, % Short Stories, Garden City, N. Y. Your handsome membership-identification card will be sent you at once. There are no dues—no obligations.

We're glad to admit a young Senior Foreman into our club and I'll bet he has some swell experiences to relate regarding his extensive trip.

Dear Secretary:

Would like to become a member of your very worth while organization. Would you admit a young man of eighteen years of age who has worked his way to Havana, Cuba, to Panama, to the West Coast thence back across country to good old New Hampshire? And I'm now Senior Foreman (First Sergeant) in the CCC's at my age.

I have read SHORT STORIES for about a year now and think it is one of the best magazines of its kind ever published.

Sincerely yours,

Wolfee W. Roberts

Army Headquarters,
1101st Co. C.C.C.,
Camp Campton 2120,
Campton,
New Hampshire

Here's a bike rider who collects news for a hobby.

Dear Secretary:

I have traveled quite a bit in Eastern Canada and the United States on a bicycle. Next year I'm planning to go to Florida with a few other fellows.

During the past six years I have played hockey, basketball and lacrosse extensively. This summer I broke into the amateur bicycle racing game and have won a few trophies.

My hobbies are stamp collecting, though I am not a very ardent one, but I shall be glad to trade with those who correspond with me. The other one is collecting news about six-day bike races and racers.

I read quite a bit and most of the books are SHORT STORIES; they have the kind of stories that interest me most.

Sincerely yours,

Andrew Richards

383 Labodel Street,
Montreal, Canada

Apparently Comrade Orkin's hobby is trading and writing letters is just a side line.

Dear Secretary:

Now that I am a member of the Ends of the Earth Club, I expect to be swamped with mail. There is nothing I like better than to write letters. I'm a New York boy who has traveled, had adventures and has friends all over. I'll trade addresses, stamps, radio supplies, books or letters with anyone who will write to me. The sooner the better.

Sincerely,

Judah Orkin

65 West 192nd Street,
Bronx, New York
U.S.A.

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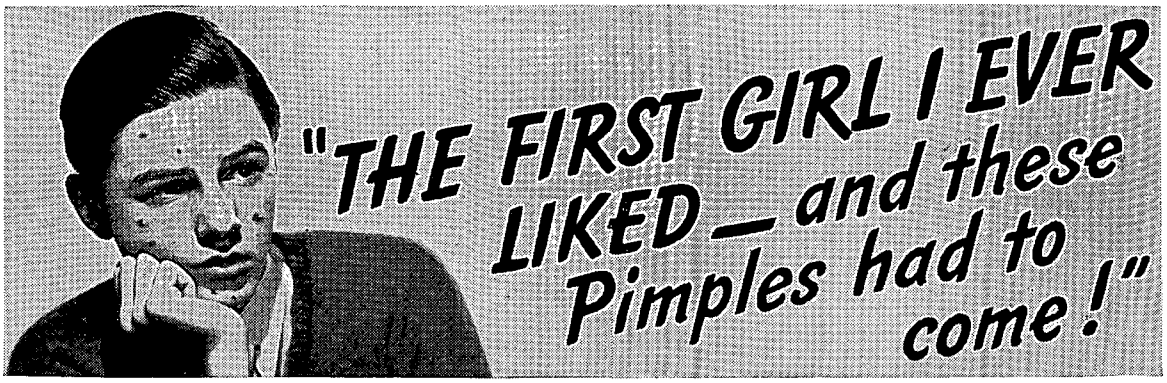
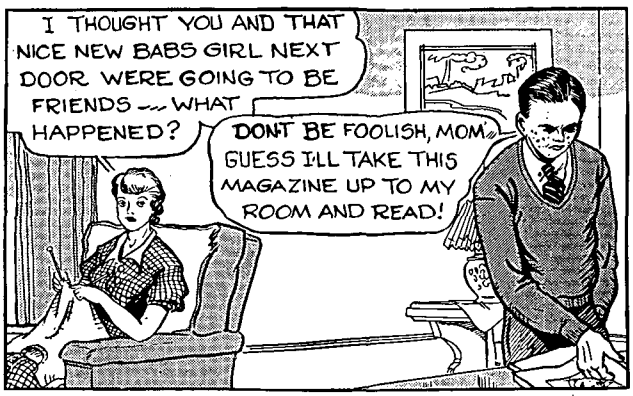
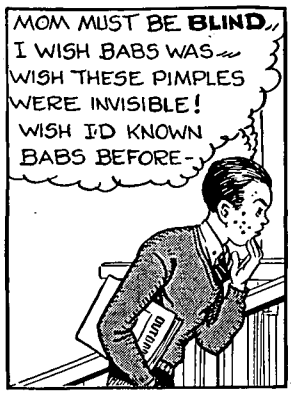
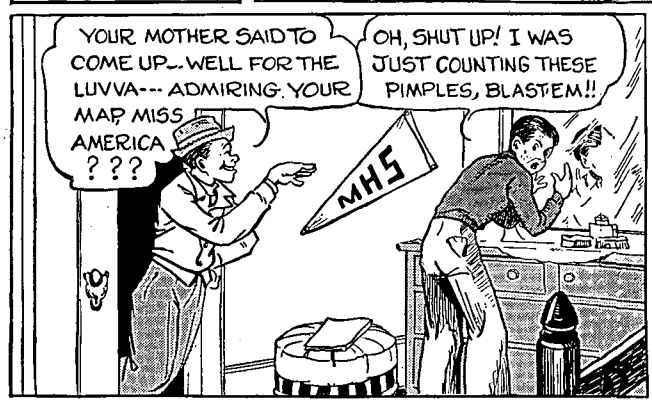


But it wasn't too late, Ben found, to mend the trouble


I THOUGHT YOU AND THAT NICE NEW BABS GIRL NEXT DOOR WERE GOING TO BE FRIENDS — WHAT HAPPENED?
DON'T BE FOOLISH, MOM. GUESS I'LL TAKE THIS MAGAZINE UP TO MY ROOM AND READ!




YOUR MOTHER SAID TO COME UP — WELL FOR THE LUVVA--- ADMIRING YOUR MAP, MISS AMERICA ???
OH, SHUT UP! I WAS JUST COUNTING THESE PIMPLES, BLAST'EM!!
MHS

DOES SEEM TO BE A LOT OF 'EM — SAY, YOU KNOW MY COUSIN RAY — HE TOOK FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST FOR HIS PIMPLES — WIPED 'EM RIGHT OFF THE OLD PHIZ
FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST DID THAT? SAY, LEAD ME TO IT!

LATER
BABS, GO TO THE SCHOOL DANCE WITH ME NEXT SATURDAY?
WHY, I SORT OF HAD A DATE, BUT — YES, I'D LOVE TO!
GOSH, I'M GLAD I GOT RID OF THOSE PIMPLES!

Don't let adolescent pimples make YOU hide away!

Between the ages 13 and 25, important glands develop. This causes disturbances throughout the body. Waste poisons in the blood irritate the skin, causing pimples.

In treating adolescent pimples, doctors prescribe Fleischmann's Yeast. This fresh yeast clears the blood of skin irritants that cause pimples. Then the pimples disappear. Eat Fleischmann's Yeast 3 times a day, before meals, until skin clears.

—clears the skin

by clearing skin irritants out of the blood

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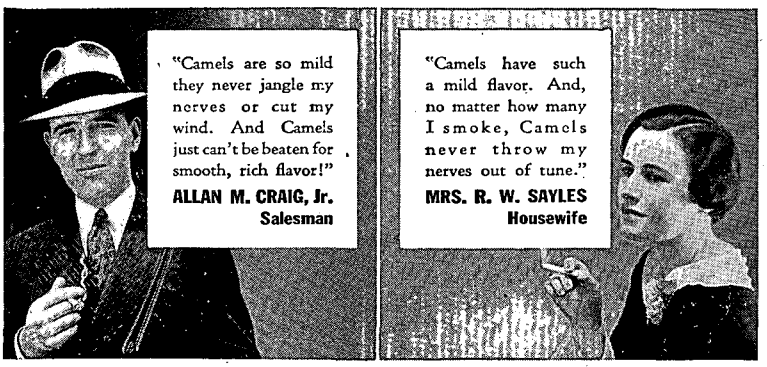
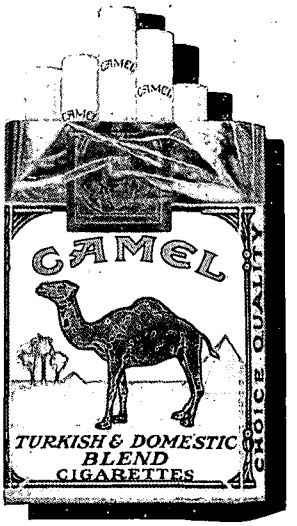
"Camels NEVER GET ON YOUR NERVES!"

© 1936, R. J. Reynolds Tob. Co.

"I CAPTURED 22 WILD ELEPHANTS," SAYS FRANK BUCK, "IN ORDER TO GET THE ONE I WANTED. FIRST, WE BUILT AN 8-ACRE KRAAL—"
THAT SHOULD BE STRONG ENOUGH TO HOLD THEM
THE ONE I WANT IS IN THAT HERD
I GO GET BEATERS
"AT A SIGNAL THE ELEPHANTS ARE STAMPEDED TOWARD THE TRAP"
"THE ENRAGED HERD, MADDENED BY THE NOISE, THUNDERS BLINDLY INTO THE KRAAL—"
WHEW! THAT WAS A JOB — HERE'S WHERE I SMOKE A CAMEL
"SMOKE? YOU BET— CAMELS! THEY ARE SO MILD THEY NEVER GET MY WIND OR UPSET MY NERVES—AND WHAT A SWELL TASTE!"
Frank Buck

YOU'LL LIKE THEIR MILDNESS TOO!


"Camels are so mild they never jangle my nerves or cut my wind. And Camels just can't be beaten for smooth, rich flavor!"
ALLAN M. CRAIG, Jr.
Salesman
"Camels have such a mild flavor. And, no matter how many I smoke, Camels never throw my nerves out of tune."
MRS. R. W. SAYLES
Housewife



TUNE IN! CAMEL CARAVAN WITH WALTER O'KEEFE • DEANE JANIS • TED HUSING • GLEN GRAY AND THE CASA LOMA ORCHESTRA • Tuesday and Thursday—9 p. m. E. S. T., 8 p. m. C. S. T., 9:30 p. m. M. S. T., and 8:30 p. m. P. S. T.—over WABC-Columbia Network.

Costlier Tobaccos!

● Camels are made from finer, MORE EXPENSIVE TOBACCOS—Turkish and Domestic—than any other popular brand.

(Signed) R. J. REYNOLDS TOBACCO COMPANY
Winston-Salem, N. C.

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